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THE COCKPIT OF THE EAST

Production
11/21/54

10 FEB 2006

By the author

THE WHEELS OF REVOLUTION
THE UNWELCOME GUEST



The Cockpit of the East

By
COLONEL T. F. O'DONNELL

KITABISTAN
ALLAHABAD

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1941
SECOND IMPRESSION 1943

03.6

107 32



PRINTED BY J. K. SHARMA AT THE ALLAHABAD LAW JOURNAL
PRESS, ALLAHABAD AND PUBLISHED BY KITABISTAN, ALLAHABAD

TO
SIR JOGENDRA SINGH
IN GRATITUDE
FOR HIS SYMPATHY AND ENCOURAGEMENT

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CHAPTER ONE

Mr. Justice Smythe and Mr. Justice Bannerji had been judges together in the High Court. Mr. Justice Bannerji in course of time was translated to London as High Commissioner for India. Mr. Justice Smythe ^{unwillingly} prematurely left his appointment in India owing to the death of his elder brother who had died childless and had left him the family estate. The estate was small but very prosperous, and the house, dignified with the name of a castle from olden times, had been completely modernised inside. The exterior still presented the same dignified and stately appearance as it did when it was first built generations before. The castle commanded a magnificent view of an undulating well-wooded country through which meandered in graceful curves a broad and noble river.

Mr. Justice Smythe was very glad to leave behind hard work and the rigours of an Indian climate to pass the remainder of his life quietly and peacefully in the house where he had spent

the happy days of his childhood. He had never lost touch with his old friend and colleague. As soon as he had established himself at Garnacanty he sent across a pressing invitation to come and visit him as soon as he possibly could. The invitation was readily accepted.

One evening after dinner as they were comfortably ensconced before a blazing fire and basking silently in its warmth, Smythe suddenly turned to his friend:—

“Do you find time hanging heavy on your hands in London?”

“More or less. I can always find something to do, of course, but I feel somehow the lack of a definite objective. The duties of my post as High Commissioner are not very onerous.”

“I am more or less in the same position also. I must confess that I was looking forward to a life, not of idleness, but of peaceful leisure. I am afraid that uninterrupted leisure can become very boring and monotonous. I have thought of a definite objective in which we both could collaborate.”

“I shall be only too pleased to collaborate with you if it is at all possible. What is your scheme?”

“You know, as well as I do, the intricacies of Hindu Law. I had the idea of codifying and simplifying, wherever possible, the momentous amount of literature on the subject. It will be in the nature of a *magnum opus*, and will take years to complete.”

Justice Bannerji sat bolt upright in his chair.

“Do you know,” he said, “that is a most extraordinary coincidence. I have been toying with that very same idea for years. Two things put me off. First of all I doubted my own ability, and secondly I thought I would never be able to spare sufficient time to tackle so vast a subject. Now everything is clear. I am with you every time.”

“You agree then?”

“Definitely and unconditionally.”

The two old colleagues and collaborators became all agog with excitement. The vigour and inspiration of youth seemed to have suddenly descended on them both. They sat up till the early hours of the morning outlining the scheme of the work and discussing details. The work, once started, necessitated not only a good deal of correspondence but also frequent interchanges of visits. During his holidays and spare time Bannerji was always a welcome visitor at Garna-

canty Castle.

Smythe was still an active man. He enjoyed his shooting and his fishing which was plentiful on his own estate, and he keenly enjoyed the hunting which was over an almost perfect country. Bannerji on the other hand was not so active. He had always led a sedentary life. His visits to Garnacanty, however, were far from boring. The soft southern climate suited him admirably, and it afforded him very great pleasure to make the rounds of the estate visiting the tenants. His kindly affectionate nature and his open-handed generosity soon made him a popular figure. The visits of "The Nabob," as he was generally called, were as welcome in the cottages, as they were at the castle.

At this time Fred Smythe, the only son of the ex-Justice was preparing for the Indian Civil Service. From their very first meeting Justice Bannerji and Fred became friends. They had long walks and intimate talks together. His father had given Fred a good deal of information about India, but Justice Bannerji had supplemented that information in many material ways. His father had given to him the views of a broad-minded European with regard to India and Indians, but

Justice Bannerji opened Fred's eyes to an altogether different angle of vision. He explained in detail the present state of affairs in India. He pointed out the clash between the hopes and ambitions of the rising generation and the rigid conservatism of the past. He dwelt on the world wide state of unrest from which India was by no means excluded.

"India," he said, as they were sitting on the lawn one evening watching the effects of a most glorious summer sunset, "has jumped at one bound from childhood to manhood. That fact is either wilfully or unconsciously ignored, and unfortunately it is the crux of the whole situation. Even I myself have been not only surprised but wonder-struck by the stupendous changes that have occurred within recent years. You are going to a wonderful country, Fred, and to a country which I do honestly believe is destined to a glorious future. Your path is beset with many difficulties, not the least of which the fact that you will become only a tiny cog in a mighty machine, fast becoming antiquated and unpopular. May God guide you."

By this time the sun had dipped below the horizon. The waters of the broad and noble river

had taken on a cheerless, if not definitely sullen, aspect. The trees in the woods were distinctly dark, and almost black and lowering. The still visible ruddy glow on the western horizon alone sounded a note of hope in the depressing and menacing atmosphere. On very many occasions in later years Fred Smythe remembered that fateful conversation on the lawns of Garnacanty.

Time passed. The work on Hindu Law progressed slowly but surely. Fred Smythe passed into the Indian Civil Service with flying colours. He was posted as Joint Magistrate to the Headquarters of a fairly large district. His surprise at this first experience was unbounded. The serious conversations he had with his father and Justice Bannerji about India seemed to have no bearing on the present situation as he found it. He was engaged from early morning till late in the evening with dull routine work, mainly in stuffy law-courts. There were opportunities for playing polo, golf, and tennis, which, as far as he could see, formed the most important item of the day's work for the other European members of the station. Perhaps more important still was the foregathering in the evening at the Club. It was a European Club, founded on the traditions

of clubs at home. Indians were eligible for admission, but only those who belonged to the Services. Some Indians joined and some did not. For all practical purposes, however, Fred found himself in an English atmosphere transplanted on foreign soil. This, he thought, could not be India, the real India, the India that his father and Justice Bannerji had described. He determined to get first hand information as soon as possible, and for the present to watch and wait.

After a few years he was given sole charge of a small district. There was no polo, no tennis, no golf, and no European Club. He had plenty of time on his hands, and he made use of it by going round to the various villages and endeavouring to get into touch with the people. Everywhere he was received with invariable courtesy and politeness, but he felt that there was a barrier between him and them which he could not break down. At last an incident occurred which won for him not only the confidence but the affection of the whole district)

It happened during the monsoon, and the monsoon in this particular year was exceptionally strong. Rivers had overflowed their banks, canal dams had been washed away, and the whole

countryside had been flooded. Smythe's small district did not suffer so badly but there was one outlying village which constituted a distinct source of danger. It was situated close beside the dried-up bed of an ancient water-way. Smythe warned the villagers and advised them to clear out of the danger zone.

"Is it an order, Sahib," asked the Patwari.

"No," replied Smythe, "but in my opinion you all are in grave danger, and it would be very advisable for you to clear out immediately."

"The rains can't last for ever, Sahib, and already they are showing signs of decreasing."

"Much rain has fallen. The rivers and canals are overflowing. This particular spot was submerged once before."

"That was many years ago, Sahib."

"It may happen again."

"It may not, Sahib. If we go to a lot of trouble and clear out, and if the waters do not come, I shall be a laughing-stock. I shall receive much abuse."

Smythe for the first time in his life understood the practical significance of a pronounced fatalism.

"If the waters come," added the Patwari, "we shall all go quickly."

Smythe realised that there was no use in trying to argue with the Patwari, or to tell him that if the waters did come, especially at night time, they would not have time to go quickly. All their goods and chattels would be irretrievably ruined, and they would be very lucky to escape with their lives. The waters did come suddenly and unexpectedly. Fortunately Smythe happened to be on the spot.

Three miles away a large canal dam, which looked apparently firm and sound, suddenly burst without any warning. The pent-up waters surged over the surrounding country, and in a very short space of time the dried-up water-bed became a swirling foaming mass of roaring water. In addition the heavens seemed to have cracked asunder with dazzling flashes of lightning and deafening thunder, and it looked as if the concentrated rains of centuries were let loose upon the earth at one fell swoop. Within six hours the village was practically totally submerged.

Smythe had a terrible time. The villagers stared fascinated at the waters rushing along the dried-up water-way. They had no sense of imminent danger. When the rain came down in torrents, they stoically sought the poor shelter

of their hovels. Smythe went from one hut to another persuading, entreating, urging the inhabitants to retire to a rough camp which he had improvised on a small plateau about a mile away. It was only when the water began to flow into their houses that they first began to realise their danger. Even then they were reluctant to move because they had been told by an old Sadhu who lived in the village and whom they all revered as a saint that not a single life would be lost. When he was pertinently asked whether they should depart or remain, the answer was truly oracular:—

“Depart or remain as you wish. No life will be lost.”

The waters rose gradually to the height of one foot, two feet, three feet. The villagers began to get really frightened, and there was a general stampede to the improvised camp. The Sadhu alone remained immovable and imperturbable.

The waters rose to four feet, almost the height of the Sadhu's hut. Some of the huts, mostly built of naked mud, had already tottered and fallen. The Sadhu's hut might go at any moment. He was a frail old man, and even if he wished to do so, was unable to make the slightest effort to save himself. Smythe could not stand still and see

a human being drown before his eyes. He dashed into the waters, picked up the Sadhu who made no resistance whatsoever, and carried him away like a child in his arms to the camp where all the others had already congregated.

In due course the waters abated. The village was reconstructed in the same old spot. Everything went on as it did before except with one vast difference as far as Smythe was concerned. By one more oracular utterance of the Sadhu he had been elevated to the ranks of the Indian hierarchy:—

“No life was lost. I told you so. Smythe Sahib was sent by the gods.”

Reports spread apace in India, and as is the universal custom gather momentum and exaggeration the farther they proceed. Before very long Smythe became the hero of a Herculean exploit. Everywhere he went he found that an affectionately smile of greeting was added to the invariable courtesy and politeness. The barrier to confidences had disappeared.

The time of Smythe's first leave was gradually approaching, and he was looking forward to it with intense pleasure. He had done three trying hot weathers in the plains, and uncon-

sciously his thoughts often strayed to the cool green lawns and shady paths of Garnacanty. The early morning dips in the clearflowing river, the long rambles through the estate in the pleasing fresh warmth of the summer sun, the cosy intimate chats with his father in the soft silent twilight, filled him even now as he only visualised them, with a warm glow of pleasant anticipation. He hoped to meet Justice Bannerji again, and relate to him his actual experiences. There were so many things that puzzled him in India, so many matters in which he wanted his practical and sympathetic advice.

"Oh well," he said, standing up and stretching himself before retiring for the night in his lonely bungalow, "I mustn't think too much of those things, or else I'll find the minutes, days, and the days, years. After all it is now near the end of February. I hope to be at Garnacanty in the first week of May, and then for four glorious months.

Smythe did actually arrive at Garnacanty on the first day of May. The soft April showers had turned the whole countryside into one verdant velvet carpet which was most refreshing to gaze upon after the arid, dusty, glaring plains of the

hot weather in India. Yes, it was good to be home again.

The meeting between father and son was undemonstrative in the extreme. A firm silent hand-clasp, and that was all. The son saw with pleasure that his father had changed very little in the four years. If anything, he looked more virile and active than ever. The father, however, noticed a distinct change in the son. The four years had changed a good-looking unaccentuated youth into a bronzed determined handsome man. They quietly resumed their old affectionate intimacy as if those four years had never elapsed.

One morning at breakfast the post was delivered. There was a pile placed before Justice Smythe and not a single epistle for his son. Justice Smythe with a hand skilled from long experience glanced through the various superscriptions. At last he found what he hoped to be there, a letter from Justice Bannerji.

“A letter from Bannerji, Fred.”

“Hurrah. I do hope he is coming along soon. There are thousands of things I want to talk to him about.”

“Excuse me, Fred, will you, whilst I glance through this. There is rather a critical point

we are discussing at present. We both hold opposite views, and have agreed to invite the opinion of a third party."

Fred smiled. He knew how keen his father was on the *magnum opus*. He watched him affectionately as he hastily turned over the pages of a rather lengthy epistle.

"Ha," he exclaimed at last, placing the open letter beside him, "the third party, a learned judge by the way, has agreed with my point of view. I did think I was right, but Bannerji's opinion always deserves the most careful consideration. He is really far sounder than I am on the finer details of the Hindu Law. Sorry, Fred, but I was rather interested in this particular point."

"Did he mention by any chance when he was likely to pay us a visit?"

Justice Smythe picked up the letter again, and turned to the end. Bannerji for some unknown reason generally announced his visits in a post-script.

"He is coming over early next week and wants to know if he may also bring his daughter."

"His daughter," queried Fred. "I didn't know he had a daughter."

"Neither did I. Somehow I always knew

Bannerji as Bannerji. I never connected him with any relations. That frequently happened in India in my time. I had many men friends, but I rarely knew their wives and daughters. I expect it is all quite different now."

"There certainly has been a great change. Among the educated classes purdah is practically non-existent. At the same time the intercourse between Europeans and the female members of an Indian household is, except in very rare cases, conspicuous by its absence. Of course in the cities and in the hill stations things are quite different. Perhaps that may be due to the large number of hotels and flats where Indians can easily entertain their guests in European fashion. I must say they are extraordinarily hospitable."

"Indeed they are, and Bannerji himself is one of the most hospitable of a hospitable people."

"I wonder how old is his daughter?"

"Let me see now. I think I can give you some idea but not a very definite one. As far as I remember Bannerji's wife died about eighteen or twenty years ago. As a matter of fact I think she died after giving birth to her first child. This girl is in all probability that child, and if that is the case she must be somewhere

about twenty years of age."

"Her arrival will upset the usual arrangements of the happy trio."

"Naturally. We shall both have to do our best to make her stay here as entertaining and amusing as possible."

"I hope she won't find it too dull. I am afraid I am not much of a hand at entertaining young ladies."

"By the way, Fred, have you ever thought of getting married?"

"The idea has never entered my head so far."

"In a way I am not at all surprised at that. As a family we were never very much addicted to marrying. My brother never married, and at one time in my life I looked upon myself as a confirmed bachelor."

Fred was now all attention. His father had never before spoken to him about his married life.

"I went down with a very bad go of enteric. My chance of recovering was looked upon as pretty nearly hopeless. It was only the most careful nursing that brought me round after a grim struggle with death. I married the nursing sister who saved my life."

"Had you known her before?"

"No. A few years after you were born she also went down with a bad go of enteric which unfortunately in her case proved fatal. You were scarcely five years of age at the time. I suppose you have not the faintest recollection of her."

"Do you know I think I have but naturally it is somewhat hazy. Was she tall?"

"Yes, fairly tall for a woman."

"Used she to ride?"

"Yes, we rode a good deal together."

"Did she ride astride?"

"Yes, and she always wore Jodpurs. They suited her very well."

"What often puzzled me at the time was to find two men coming back from a ride in the evening. One of the men used to pat my head and slap me on the shoulder in a friendly manner. The other used to swing me up in his arms and kiss me. Occasionally to my great delight he would put me on his horse and give me a short ride. Later on in the evening the same man, as I thought, used to come along and kiss me good-night, but then he used to be dressed in woman's clothes. I gave it up as one of the things I could not understand."

"Is there anything else you can remember?"

"Yes, there is one particular scene which I can visualise even now."

"What is that?"

"I remember being brought into a room where there was a lady ill in bed. Everyone and everything, it seemed to me, was very solemn and serious. The lady took me in her arms and kissed me. I think she was crying."

"That was your mother, Fred. She died holding you in her arms."

CHAPTER TWO

The morning that Justice Smythe and his son drove into the station to meet their expected guests was the morning of what they call in Ireland 'a pet day'. Though only the middle of May, it was more like a day in midsummer. The warmth of the sun, however, was tempered by a fresh cool breeze. The hedges of the country lanes through which they passed were one mass of the white feathery may-flower, whilst the banks underneath were splashed all over with innumerable golden circlets of smiling primroses. The yellowing wheat, and the grey-green oats stood well up above the verdant green of the thickly-grassed meadows, and the dun cows and the white sheep added a note of peaceful animation to their beautiful surroundings.

On arriving at the village station they were met by "Jim, the Stationmaster." By this soubriquet he was known to everyone but likewise everyone, and also his business, was known to Jim. He was a big powerful man with a cheerful

ruddy countenance. It was a common report that in his hey-day he lifted a full half barrel of porter with one hand, but now he was quite content to do his fair share of work in emptying the contents.

“Good-morning, your honour. Good-morning, Mr. Fred. Is it the way ye’re going somewhere or may be ye’ll be after expecting someone?”

Justice Smythe and his son smiled. They knew Jim of old. Both had the same thought:—

“What a delightful and insinuating cross-examiner Jim would have made in any court of law. He would, in his ingratiating manner, succeed in ferreting out information from the most cantankerous and surly hostile witness.”

“We are expecting some guests to arrive by this train, Jim,” said Justice Smythe.

“Faith, ye won’t have long to wait. She’s running up to time for a wonder, the ould divil is nearly always late, bad scran to her.”

“What a delightful morning for May, Jim,” remarked Fred.

“Sure it is that same, glory be to God. And may be it’s the Nabob that’s coming.”

Fred left his father to deal with the situation whilst he listened with amusement.

“It is, Jim. We are expecting Mr. Bannerji

and his daughter. Why do you call him the Nabob?"

"It's aisy to say for wan thing, and he spends his money like wan. I suppose his daughter will be by way of being a kind of princess."

"She is just plain Miss Bannerji, Jim."

"Well all I can say is that if she is the daughter of her father she'll be princess here before very long."

A long low whistle sounded in the distance and soon the incoming train was seen leisurely negotiating a pronounced curve in the railway line.

"Tare an' ages," exclaimed Jim, "and hundreds of them blackguards bawling for their tickets."

He sauntered slowly along to the ticket office close by. There was one solitary figure smoking a pipe, with his back turned to the little group for the sake of politeness, but unostentatiously straining every nerve to catch as much of the conversation as he possibly could.

Bannerji descended from the carriage whose steps were high above the lowly village platform, and turned round in order to help his daughter to alight. A tall slim girl, dressed in a

blue and silver sari, stepped gracefully on to the platform. Bannerji greeted his two friends warmly.

"This is my daughter Sheila," he simply said.

Both father and son were struck by the beauty of the girl, but even more so by her easy natural charming manner. As soon as the preliminary greetings were over she turned to Justice Smythe:—

"Do you know I don't feel a bit a stranger? It seems like meeting old friends. My father was always talking about you both. Besides I have seen you every morning for years."

Justice Smythe looked at her in surprise and Sheila laughed a merry ringing laugh.

"My father always brings about your photo with him and always puts it in a prominent place. It doesn't flatter you very much."

Justice Smythe laughed as he replied:—

"I am very glad to hear you say so. I hope you mean it."

"Of course I do. I always mean what I say and say what I mean. That is one of the characteristics which I have tried to cultivate not only from an ethical but also from a practical point

of view. I think honesty is the best policy in speech as well as in action."

She genuinely surprised Justice Smythe with her perfect speech and intonation and also with the serious outlook on life which he did not expect to find in so young a girl.

Further conversation was cut short by a loud explosion meant to be a gentle admonitory cough intimating the presence of the Stationmaster.

"Luggage all right, Jim," asked Bannerji, shaking hands with him.

"As right as rain, sor. It's meself that's glad to see you back again and looking so well."

"You are looking very well yourself."

"Sure an honest day's work never did anyone no harm, only it's aisier and pleasanter to work for some than for others."

Bannerji acknowledged the compliment in his usual generous manner, and turned to his daughter:—

"Do you know the meaning of 'plamass,' Sheila?"

"I am afraid I don't, but I am never averse to learning something new."

"'Plamass' is an Irish term which very succinctly describes a combination of courtesy and

diplomacy. Jim is a past master in the art."

"If you mean to say that we weren't all looking forward with pleasure to your coming along with the charming princess, faith, you're wrong entirely."

"I think," said Sheila laughing, "I now perfectly understand the meaning of 'plamass.'"

Fred drove the car with Sheila beside him. The two old friends sat behind. Sheila feasted her eyes in the surrounding country, and inhaled long deep breaths of the sweet fragrant air.

"What a perfectly heavenly place," she exclaimed at last, "especially after London. I should be well content to live, and even die here."

"What about your own wonderful country?"

"Do you think it wonderful?"

"I certainly do."

"Do you like India?"

"I went out predetermined to like it, as I had heard such wonderful accounts both from your father and from my father. In the beginning I must admit that I was sorely disappointed. My work as Joint Magistrate kept me busy throughout the whole day, and sometimes part of the night. I saw nothing of the real India, the India I wanted to see. I might just as well have been

in the Secretariat in London."

"How long have you been in India?"

"Almost four years."

"You are now a Collector Sahib, I suppose?"

"Not fully fledged. Acting for the time being in a small district."

"In any case you have now a chance of coming in contact with the people. How do you find them?"

"Very likeable when you really get to know them, but that takes a good deal of time and trouble. I very much doubt if I should have got to know them so soon were it not for a little incident that happened during the monsoon last year."

"Do tell me about it, please. I should very much like to know the details of what happened."

"The monsoon was particularly bad. Rivers and canals were flooded. One village in my district was in the danger zone. I warned them repeatedly to leave the place, but following the instructions of an old Sadhu, they refused to budge an inch. The waters did come suddenly and unexpectedly and they all left *en masse* except the old Sadhu. He sat there in his hut whilst the waters slowly mounted higher and higher.

At last I went in and carried him away to a safe place. It was a very petty incident really but it made a wonderful difference as far as I was concerned."

"In what way?"

"Before this the people were always polite but distinctly aloof. Unconsciously I was made to feel that I was a being apart who could have no share in their real life. After the flood incident things seemed to have changed instantaneously and almost miraculously. Not only did they receive me as one of themselves but they insisted on treating me as a kind of oracle or High Priest. All barriers to confidences had been completely washed away. They spoke to me freely and naturally. They came of their own accord to consult me about even the most insignificant details, and my advice was invariably followed."

"I am very glad indeed that India has accepted you. There are some Europeans whom it does not, and will not accept."

"Why are you glad?"

"Natural, isn't it? I like my country to be understood and loved by as many people as possible."

By this time they had arrived at the castle.

Sheila was enraptured with the stately building, the trim lawns, and the magnificent prospect.

"I wonder you ever left this paradise," she said.

"It is only recently that the place was left to my father. It belonged to his elder brother who had no immediate heir."

"The whole place and setting is lovely, perfectly lovely."

Bannerji was lodged in his same suite and Sheila had a room beside him. The former happy trio now settled down into a happy quartette. The very first evening Bannerji insisted on taking Sheila round for a visit to his old cronies amongst the tenants. She was received everywhere with open arms and the ritual was always the same:—

"Won't you come in and sit down, Princess. The kettle is on the hob, and I won't be wan minnit making a nice fresh cup of tay for you."

In one home an interesting little incident occurred. The man of the house was away, and the only occupants were a buxom young wife with her fair curly-headed little son. The usual ritual was gone through. Sheila, who was dressed in a sari, refused the tea but went in to sit down for a few minutes. The little son after

a while began to whisper to his mother.

"Glory be to God," exclaimed the mother, "did you hear what he's after saying, Princess. He asked me if you were the Blessed Virgin. And sure, God bless and save us all, you are like the pictures in the chapel."

Their last visit was to Jim the Stationmaster who lived in a neat little cottage with an acre of ground attached. Jim's wife would take no refusal, especially as the 'tay' was already on the table.

"Did you know, Sheila," said her father, "that Jim was a most notorious character. He was 'on the run' as they say for months and months, and is reputed to have shot hundreds of policemen."

"Arrah don't mind your father, princess, you'd think he was Irish the way he has of joking sometimes."

"Is that true, Mrs. Jim," asked Sheila.

"There's no doubt he was wan of the boys during the troubles, and if he did shoot a few of them 'Black and Tans,' sure 'twas only to save his own skin and the skin of others."

"You are having a bit of trouble in your own country, Princess?" interposed Jim.

Jim knew his wife and what she was capable of saying when she got started on the 'Black and Tans'. He was afraid that she might say something that would offend the delicate ears of the Princess, and so he determined to head her off that subject at all costs.

"'T is a great pity," he continued, "that your country isn't a bit nearer, and we'd all only be too glad to give you a bit of a helping hand."

"It is very nice indeed to have your sympathy and good wishes," replied Sheila.

"Sure if wishes would count for anything, you'd be free like ourselves in the morning."

When they got back to the Castle they found Fred sitting alone on the lawn. Justice Smythe had gone to his study to peruse some notes which he received that morning from Bannerji. The latter very soon joined him and Sheila and Fred were left alone together.

"How did you get on," enquired Fred.

Sheila related her experiences.

"I am glad you were more fortunate than I was in India. You evidently have been accepted instantaneously."

"That is probably on account of my father."

"Your father may probably have made things

easier, but the fact that you were invited everywhere to have a cup of 'tay' means that they look upon you as one of themselves and that you have been received into the fold. The Irish peasant is always polite and pleasant to a stranger, but he can be as distinctly and definitely aloof as the Indian villager. Your undoubted welcome was due to your own personality and sympathy. You evidently liked them."

"Liked them. I loved them. I have loved everything from the moment I set foot in the station this morning."

"They sensed that feeling instinctively and they met you more than halfway. They don't do things by halves. They give you their lasting love or their bitter hatred."

Sheila lay back in her chair and closed her eyes for a moment. In the broad day-light she looked striking and beautiful. Here in the twilight of a summer evening she looked ethereal and lovely. No wonder, thought Fred, that she reminded the fair curly-haired little boy of the celestial Madonna. Suddenly she opened her eyes and asked him a most unexpected question.

"What do you do by way of keeping fit here?"

The question so startled him that he took some time before he replied:—

“In the winter of course there is the hunting and the shooting and the fishing. I am afraid there is not very much doing now.”

“What do you do?”

“A little bit of sculling in the river in the morning, and then a swim. In the evening I help to take out some of the horses who are eating their heads off for want of exercise. By-the-way there is a perfectly good tennis court. My father and I have a knock-up occasionally in the evening. Perhaps you play tennis?”

“Yes, I do play tennis and, without being conceited, I may say that I play rather well. I can swim and ride, also rather well. I don’t know anything about sculling. Perhaps you would be good enough to teach me.”

“Of course, with pleasure.”

“You are not shocked, are you?”

“Not in the least, but to be honest, you have given me a bit of a surprise.”

“You certainly looked as if I had. I suppose from your experience of India my alleged proficiency in outdoor games has outraged all your ideas.”

Fred was certainly not outraged in his ideas, but he had received rather an unexpected shock. He prided himself as a judge of character and characteristics on first impressions, and he made it a hobby of checking his impressions with actual known facts. His first impression of Sheila was entirely wrong. He had placed her as a refined, cultured, orthodox Indian girl. Refined and cultured she certainly was but his idea about her orthodoxy had to be changed immediately and radically. He very quickly adjusted himself to this new state of affairs.

"There is no question of outrage of ideas," he replied. "I have no fixed or preconceived ideas. The world is always changing, and the pace has incredibly increased within recent years. A rigid conservatism is just as pernicious as an optimistic belief in a millennium. If you had stepped out of the train this morning in a European travelling costume I should not have been in the least surprised, but—"

"I know," interrupted Sheila. "The purdah, the sari, and a rigid conservatism are all part and parcel of the same idea. I order not to give you any more startling surprises I think I had better tell you the story of my life. Would you like

to hear it?"

"Very much indeed."

"I think it only fair to tell you because I already pretty well know the story of your life. My father loves you as if you were his own son, and he has very often spoken to me about you. I was very anxious to meet you."

Fred was human. He couldn't refrain from asking:—

"Has the result been disappointing?"

"Yes, very."

"Serves me right," thought Fred, "for being such a conceited ass."

"I am sorry," he replied. "I always think that a previous reputation has a double disadvantage. If the reputation is good it is very hard to live up to it, and if the reputation is bad it is just as hard to live it down."

"You need not grumble anyway. You have gone one better than your previous reputation."

"I thought you said you were disappointed."

"Yes, but agreeably disappointed."

"Oh."

"I expected to find you very serious and more or less weighed down with a sense of responsibility."

"Priggish in fact, or words to that effect."

"No, not that exactly, though I expect we all are conceited in one way or another. It is rather difficult to explain."

"Please do not try to explain. I am quite satisfied with the verdict. The story of your life will be much more interesting."

"There has been nothing wildly exciting in my life so far, though it has been out of the common for an Indian girl. My mother died shortly after I was born. I had no brothers or sisters, nor as far as I can remember had I ever very much to do with children of my own age. My father engaged a European nurse for me, and later on, when I was old enough to commence my studies, a European governess. Not one of those thin anti-diluvian bespectacled governesses but a modern of the moderns. She was young and pretty, and guaranteed as qualified to educate me on the most up-to-date lines. Do you know I think I was extraordinarily fortunate in my Governess."

"Who was she?"

"Her name was Mabel Davenant. Her parents were gentle folk but poor. As she was the youngest of a large family they gave her all

that they could, which was simply their own culture and refinement, and also, by dint of scraping and sacrifice, a sound practical educational training. Those things she did her best to impart to me in her own peculiar way which was more by example than by precept. She taught me to swim, to ride, and to play tennis. We were the best part of the day in the open air, and when I was pleasantly tired she used to talk and read to me. There was no set curriculum, no rigid daily time-table. Her main object was to cultivate my intelligence through interest and observation, to build up my physique, and to mould my character."

"You were extraordinarily fortunate indeed."

"My father had complete confidence in her, and left me entirely in her charge. At the same time he also took an active part in my education in his own way. Never a day passed that he did not come along and join us. Sometimes it was in the morning, sometimes in the evening, and occasionally at odd times. There was never any formal questions as to how I was progressing in my studies. He simply sat down and chatted. It was only many years later that I began to realise the adroitness of those clever little talks.

The talks were about all kinds of things, but I was invariably drawn into the conversation. They must have designedly talked down to the level of my intelligence, and my opinions were always sought. If I was right they calmly agreed with me, if I was palpably in the wrong they patiently pointed out the causes of my erroneous conclusions. I do not know which I enjoyed the more, the open-air outings, the informal lessons, or the enjoyable little conversations. I was perfectly happy and content, and could see no reason why things should not continue like this for ever. Things did continue like this until I was about twelve years of age, and then the first great change in my life occurred."

Sheila paused, evidently visualising again that sudden and shattering change in her little world which she had believed to be permanent.

"What was the cause of this great change?"

"Mabel fell in love and got married."

"Bad luck. Your perfect little world was destroyed."

"Yes, absolutely and completely, but fortunately not too abruptly. We were stationed at Nucklow at the time when I noticed one particular man. My father kept open house, and we

always had numerous visitors. Some came for tea and tennis, and many others came for dinner and bridge. This particular man's visits, however, became more and more frequent until one evening he was brought in by my father to join in the informal causerie. He was the only stranger who had ever been accorded such a privilege."

"Then I suppose you began to suspect something."

"Not at first, but I did when his visits became almost daily. At first I resented his visits to our little conferences, but after a short time I got to like him very much. He was a small man and not a bit good-looking, but he had a very pleasant voice and the most charming manners. He was always gentle and kind to me, and he told me the most delightful stories. His travels must have been world-wide because he related to me the strange manners and customs of the countries he had visited, and also the various experiences he had encountered. He was always amusing and entertaining, and his humorous anecdotes always sent the three of us into roars of laughter. I was surprised when I heard that he was a soldier. His name was Major Cathcart, and he was a dis-

tant relation of Mabel's mother.

"Early one morning Mabel came to my room. She was flushed and excited. Her eyes sparkled. I thought I had never seen her looking so pretty. She told me that she was going to marry Major Cathcart. They were both really and truly in love with each other. She added that she was very lucky indeed, more lucky than she deserved. He had plenty of money. He was going to retire from the Army and settle down at home. The only sorrow or regret she experienced was the fact that she would have to leave me whom she loved ever so dearly, and also my father who had always treated her like his own daughter.

"I was terribly upset at the thought of being separated from her for ever and always. I was very fond of my father, of course, but Mabel had been both a mother and a grown-up sister to me. I couldn't bear the thought of separation and I burst into a paroxysm of tears. She took me in her arms and tried to comfort and console me. She was crying too. In my loneliness and despair I entreated her to take me away."

Voices sounded close behind them. They turned round. Justice Smythe and Bannerji, deep in conversation, were coming along to join

them.

“To be continued in our next,” said Sheila smiling.

CHAPTER THREE

It was not till the following evening that Sheila was to continue the interrupted story of her life. She had arranged with Fred to meet him at the boat-house at seven o'clock in the morning. When she arrived Fred was already waiting for her.

"Good-morning, Collector Sahib."

"Good-morning, Princess."

They both laughed.

"I think we had better start all over again," remarked Fred.

"Good-morning, Sheila."

"Good-morning, Fred."

"That is ever so much better. I see that punctuality is one of your virtues."

"Yes, it was one of the very first things ever drilled into me. Indians are not particularly noted for their punctuality."

"Neither are the Irish. There is an old saying which is typical. 'One thing we have lashing and lavings of in Ireland is time and water.'"

"But surely time and water are two distinct things."

"As Jim the stationmaster would say, 'who'd bother their heads about a trifling little thing like that when you can't stop either of them.'"

They went into the boat-house and stripped off their wrappers. Sheila had her long hair carefully covered with a water-proof bathing-cap. She stood there tall, slim, and straight like a young sapling. Fred looked at her and was struck by the peculiar whiteness of her skin. It was just like ivory.

"I am afraid that sculling will be a bit too strenuous for you. Why not start off with the canoe? I think you will find that will give you quite sufficient exercise, especially at this early hour of the morning."

"I'd simply love to try the canoe. Is it very difficult to manage?"

"It is purely a question of balance. Moreover it is light and easily propelled, but it is also very easily capsized. I'll just show you."

He got into the canoe and with the help of the paddle shoved it lightly out into the river. Keeping close to the bank he gave a skilful demonstration as to how a canoe should be pro-

perly handled. He twisted and turned, backed and propelled until at last Sheila could contain herself no longer and exclaimed:—

“Oh, please, that is enough. Do come in again. I am dying to have a shot at it.”

With a few vigorous strokes of the paddle the canoe shot gracefully forward and glided in noiselessly to the landing-stage.

Fred helped her into the canoe very carefully.

“Just hold on a minute, will you? I’ll get into the sculling boat and keep near you until you find your feet.”

Sheila rocked with laughter and the canoe would certainly have capsized had she not caught hold of the landing-stage.

“What the dickens are you laughing at?”

“The absurdity of finding my feet in a wobbly canoe. That’s Irish, I suppose, but I’ll soon pick up the language. I am rather quick on the uptake.”

She certainly was. In less than ten minutes she had found her balance, and was able to manœuvre the canoe with a certain amount of proficiency.

“You go along and have your strenuous exercise. I’ll play about here until you come

back."

Fred turned the head of his boat up-stream and rowed away with easy swinging strokes.

"Do be careful," he shouted back.

"I'll soon be able to race you, with a start."

The unusual exercise soon made her tired. She sat quietly in the canoe with the paddle across her knees. Allowing herself to drift gently with the current she fell into a pleasant reverie. After what seemed an incredibly short space of time she heard the creaking of the row-locks, and the rhythmic swish of the water. Fred was returning.

"You didn't go very far, did you?"

"About a mile up-stream. I find that is good enough to start the day with. Now, what about a swim? Do you think the water will be too cold for you?"

"I don't think so. A plunge and a swim will be the very thing after being cramped up in the canoe, though it was perfectly glorious."

There was a diving-board fitted up close beside the boat-house. It hung well out over the bank and afforded an opportunity of diving down into fathoms of water almost as clear as crystal. Sheila ran lightly along the board, jumped

right up into the air, executed a beautiful curve, and entered the water, hands foremost, almost without a splash. She seemed just to skim below the surface and was up again in the fraction of a second.

"Come along," she cried. "I'll race you this time even without a start."

Fred plunged in immediately and was beside her in a moment.

During a brisk walk back to the Castle they discussed the programme for the day.

"What would you like to do?" enquired Fred.

"Just at present I am one of the world's workers. I am helping my father to prepare his manuscript for the press. I do all his typing for him."

"You won't be at that all day, will you?"

"All the morning anyway until lunch-time."

"And the usual siesta after luncheon, I suppose?"

"Yes, and then by tea-time I am ready to start fresh the second portion of the day. That won't upset your arrangements in any way, I hope."

"By no means. This is Liberty Hall and you can do absolutely as you please. What about coming for a ride in the evening?"

"I should like to very much indeed. By the way what are you going to do with yourself all the morning?"

"I too am one of the world's workers just at present."

"Even though you are supposed to be enjoying a well-earned holiday."

"I am enjoying my holiday all right, and perhaps all the more for getting a certain amount of work done."

"What are you working at? Or is that a state secret not to be divulged to a single in the whole world?"

"There is not the slightest bit of secrecy about the affair. I'll give you three guesses."

"You must give me some pointers."

"Ask any questions you like."

"Is the work connected with England or India?"

"Probably both, possibly neither."

"That's not very illuminating and doesn't get me very far. Has it anything to do with your present employment?"

"Indirectly perhaps."

"I am progressing somewhat even though slowly. Is it mental, social, or physical?"

"Mental."

"At last I have got on to something. Now I'll start my guesses. Pelmanism?"

"Wrong."

"That's one guess gone west anyway."

Then Sheila thought she had a brain-wave. Perhaps just as she was helping her father, he also might be helping his father with the *magnum opus*.

"Law?" she hazarded.

"Wrong again."

"I've got it," she cried at last. "It is a language."

"Yes, you got it all right that time. I have taken up the study of the Russian language."

"Why the Russian language particularly?"

"Do you remember a few years ago we purchased a little strip of territory in the North of India?"

"Gilgit, wasn't it?"

"That's right. On the borders of Gilgit Russian and British sentries are now facing each other. Under those circumstances I thought that a knowledge of the Russian language might prove useful some day."

As the weather was still fine tea was laid on the lawn. Fred was the first to arrive, booted and

spurred for the ride. Soon after he was joined by his father and Bannerji.

"I believe you initiated Sheila into the mysteries of canoeing this morning, Fred," remarked Bannerji.

"Yes, and do you know she got on remarkably well. She found her balance almost immediately, and the question of paddling is only a matter of patience and practice."

"I am not a bit surprised, Sheila is very quick and adaptable. I am afraid I can't take any credit for that, as I have always been worse than useless at any form of outdoor sport."

"You have made up for that in many other ways," interposed Justice Smythe. "You were a fluent speaker, a brilliant writer and President of the Union in your Oxford days. In addition you managed to get your 'blue for Chess.' "

"Only 'half-blue,' " smiled Bannerji. "Sheila's adaptability is solely due to her governess, Miss Davenant. She was a wonderful girl in every way. At first Sheila and herself were like mother and daughter, and eventually they were like two devoted sisters. I was very sorry to lose her, but I was very glad that she found the happiness she thoroughly deserved. She married a gunner,

named Major Cathcart."

"Cathcart," repeated Justice Smythe. "That name sounds familiar. Now let me see can I place him?"

"I should think that in all probability you must have met him. He was always, like yourself, stationed in the United Provinces."

"Ah, I think I've got him. On the small size, wasn't he, and rather extensively travelled?"

"Yes, he was always away on some trek or other in or outside India."

"That's right. I met him at Haragpur where I happened to be District and Sessions Judge at the time. He sat beside me one night at dinner at the Commissioner's house. I found him most interesting and entertaining. He had just finished a trek through Tibet to China and back again to India by way of Mongolia, Russia, and Afghanistan. A most charming fellow."

"Sheila tells me that he still disappears in the blue for months at a time. By the way here she comes at last."

Sheila came skipping across the lawn, looking neat and smart in her well-cut riding kit.

"Sorry I'm late. Serves me right in a way because it was only this morning that I was swank-

ing about my punctuality. I am not going to make things worse, however, by offering excuses."

"It is not you who are late," replied Justice Smythe with a courtly bow, "but it is we who are early."

"What is this the word you mentioned this morning, Dad? A kind of mixture of courtesy and diplomacy."

"Plamass."

"I must cultivate that art. It sounds very good to the taste."

Fred laughed heartily.

"Now, what the dickens are you laughing at?" asked Sheila.

"You are picking up the language very fast.

"Why? What have I said?"

"The combination of sound and taste is a delightful effort."

As Sheila was pouring out tea, Bannerji dilated on the peculiar turns and phrases given to the same language in different countries.

"It would make an extraordinary interesting study," said he, "to see how far characteristics are portrayed in the turn of a phrase". Just now when Sheila apologised for being late, the reply was that we were early. An Englishman would

have accepted the statement but would have qualified his abruptness by adding that it didn't really matter very much. An American would have pulled his watch and replied:—

“ ‘Seven and a half minutes, to be exact. We've got to make it up somehow.’ ”

“I see your point,” replied Justice Smythe. “The American makes time his god, the Englishman treats time in a hard, practical, matter-of-fact manner, and the Irishman takes no account of it whatsoever.”

“Perhaps the Irishman,” remarked Fred, “is inherently a bit of a philosopher. He thinks that life is long enough, and doesn't bother his head about the loss of a trifling few minutes here and there.”

“He may be like the Indian,” suggested Sheila, “who thinks that a few minutes in a short life is of infinitesimal importance when compared with eternity.”

Soon after, the horses were brought round and Sheila and Fred started out on their ride.

“What would you like to do, Sheila? A gentle hack along the roads or a bit of a gallop?”

“A gallop, by all means, but where?”

“There is a race-course about a mile away.

Shall we make for that?"

"Let's."

They jogged along to the race-course and Fred proceeded to point out the track. It was a two-mile circular course with practically a straight stretch for the last six furlongs.

"What a beautiful place for a gallop," exclaimed Sheila.

"Yes, it is, and the track is in good order as they are having their annual meeting here in about a fortnight's time. Shall we go to the starting-point, which by the way, is also the winning post, and do the regular round?"

"Why not make a regular race of it? It will be glorious fun."

"Yes, and we'll be on practically equal terms. My mount is the stronger and has the speed of yours, but I should think I'll be giving away four stone or thereabouts. That ought to even things up fairly well."

"Come along then, and we'll start."

Walking their horses to the starting-point, they wheeled round and got away together.

In the meantime the labourers who were working on the course sensed that there was something afoot.

"By the holy smoke," said one of them, "if it isn't a race between Mr. Fred and the Princess. Come on, ye divils."

They all ceased work on the spot and made straight for the winning post. One of them turned himself into an improvised Bookie and began to lay the odds:—

"Evens on the field," he shouted. "A fair field and no favour, and no money, no bets."

"A bob on the Princess."

"A bob on Mr. Fred."

"A bob on Mr. Fred."

"A bob on the Princess."

The betting was brisk, but even then, by the time they had finished, the horses were already in the straight for home. Sheila was leading by a couple of lengths.

"Begob, the Princess have him bate," said one of her supporters.

"Yerra, hould your whist for wan two minutes and you'll see whether Mr. Fred is after being bate or not," was the reply.

Up the straight came the two riders, heads well down on their mounts. Fred began to overhaul slowly, and at last about a furlong from home succeeded in drawing level. Along they both

came in a ding-dong race. Fred drew slightly ahead. Sheila again drew level. The little crowd of spectators went wild with excitement as the two horses flashed past the winning post.

"Dead hate," shouted the Bookie who had constituted himself as Judge.

"Dead hate, your grandmother," cried one of the supporters of Sheila. "The Princess was leading by a street."

"Your eyes must be in the back of your pole," retorted one who had backed Fred. "He was looking back smiling at her a hundred yards from home."

"I declare it a dead hate," repeated the Bookie, "you've all lost your money as nayther of 'em won."

Both sides turned against the Bookie. The noise and the shouting were so loud and continuous that Sheila and Fred came back to see what was the matter.

"Which of ye won, Mr. Fred," asked the Bookie.

"A dead heat I think. What do you think, Sheila?"

"A dead heat, most certainly."

"Now, who's right, ye omadhauns," said the

Bookie turning to the little crowd, "I suppose you'll be saying next that I'm not entitled to your paltry few bob."

"What's that?" enquired Fred.

"I told them that the race was a dead hate and since nayther of them won they lost their money."

The Bookie looked straight at Fred, and deliberately closed one eye.

Before Fred had time to reply, Sheila interposed:—

"That doesn't seem to be fair. Suppose he gives back their money. Then I'll pay those who backed me, and you can pay all those who backed you. How would that do?"

"I think everyone would be completely satisfied," replied Fred smiling.

"Except me," said the Bookie forlornly.

"Here," said Fred, handing him over two shillings, "since you backed neither you win on both because you didn't lose. Satisfied now?"

"Right you are, Mr. Fred. We'll have it at that."

As they were sitting on the lawn sipping cool drinks, Fred reminded Sheila of the interrupted story of her life.

"My entreaties to be allowed to go away with Mabel were successful. I was suddenly transported from East to West."

"Like you are this evening with regard to your costume."

"You could hardly expect me to ride in a sari. At the same time I have always adhered to Indian dress, except in the case where it would be either impossible or absurd, as for example in tennis or riding."

"I think you are quite right."

"Oh, but you needn't for a moment think that I came to this decision all by myself. On the contrary at one time I desperately wanted to adopt everything Western."

"Why?"

"I adored Mabel. I thought she was everything that was good and perfect. I wanted to imitate her in all respects. I wanted to cut my hair short like hers. I wanted to wear clothes and shoes like her. In fact I wanted to imitate her in every way I possibly could. Mabel, however, was determined and put down her foot. I think it was the only real difference of opinion we ever had. Usually I implicitly obeyed her wishes without the slightest hesitation."

"What reasons did she give you for adopting this line of policy? Most governesses would have readily acceded to your wishes, and your father I am sure, would not have had any objection."

"That really was my strongest argument. I told her how desperately I wanted to make the change, and also that my father would not have the slightest objection. At that time she gave me no reason, but simply asked me to trust her, which I naturally did."

"What were the reasons she gave you eventually?"

"Very much later, when we had become like sisters, she herself reverted to the question. She told me that she wanted me to be myself and not a conscious imitator. She added that since I was an Indian, I should dress like an Indian and preserve my own individuality. She impressed on me the fact that imitators never excited genuine admiration but frequently aroused a more or less justifiable contempt. I saw how true her remarks were when I came to England."

"Wasn't your father very reluctant to allow you to go?"

"At first he was, but then he realised that he

would have to be separated from me in any case for a certain number of years in order to have my education completed. Mabel and Major Cathcart were quite willing to take charge of me and place me in a good school in England. They declared they would only be too delighted to have me for the holidays. In the end my father saw that it was really the best solution of the difficulty.

“Mabel and Major Cathcart were married before they left India and I accompanied them to England. Mabel got me admitted into her own old school, and I stayed with them during the holidays. My time at school was uneventful. The girls were all nice to me and so were the teachers. I took part in all the activities of the school and was readily accepted as one of themselves. There was, however, this distinct difference that I always wore my sari except, of course, in the case of outdoor games when I dressed like the others.”

“Were you never lonely?”

“Often and often, especially in the dark, drab, dreary winter days. I used often to long for India, for its warmth, its colour, and its brilliant sunshine. It was only at school that I experienced those lonely spells. I was always happy

during the holidays. Very often Major Cathcart was away for weeks at a time, and on these occasions Mabel and I were drawn even closer together. Four or five years passed quickly, and when I had finished school the problem arose with regard to the next step. Should I proceed further with my studies, or should I return to India? Fortunately the problem solved itself, at least partially.

“That was indeed fortunate because the problem was a serious one. How was it solved?”

“My father was appointed High Commissioner for India, and I went to live with him in London. This did not mean separation from Mabel. As a matter of fact I think I saw her more frequently during the next three years than I did when I was at school. They lived in Devon and we interchanged visits pretty often. Moreover it came to be an understood thing that whenever Major Cathcart went away on one of his mysterious journeys, Mabel was always to come and live with us.”

“Why do you say mysterious journeys?”

“Because Mabel never knew when he was likely to go. Neither did she ever know where he was going nor when he was likely to return.”

"That certainly sounds mysterious."

"What seemed to me just as strange was that my father appeared to know more about these journeys than Mabel. Major Cathcart and my father had always been great friends from the very beginning but since they met again in London they became more intimate than ever. For hours on end they used to remain closeted together. One day we were making preparations for one of our periodical visits to Devon when my father was called to the phone. He returned after a few minutes."

"We're not going to Devon to-day, Sheila."

"What a pity" I replied. "I was looking forward to meeting Mabel."

"You will meet Mabel all right. She is arriving this evening."

"How perfectly lovely. How long is she going to stay?"

"I do not know. She is coming alone."

"I suppose it is another one of Major Cathcart's mysterious journeys."

"Yes, it is."

"What are they all about, Dad?"

"I cannot tell you, Sheila my dear. I can tell you, however, that they are neither for money

nor pleasure."

"For what then?"

"For unselfish devotion to the noblest of all ideals."

"And what is that?"

"Service to one's country."

CHAPTER FOUR

“Do you know,” continued Sheila, “that little conversation made a most vivid and lasting impression on me. I can remember distinctly not only every word that was uttered but the varying shades of expression on my father’s countenance. I suppose I was excited and unduly receptive first on account of the preparations for our visits to Devon, and then at the prospect of Mabel’s arrival. I think I shall always look back upon it as a most important crisis in my life.”

Up to that time Sheila had been lounging comfortably in her chair. Now she quietly changed her position. Placing her elbows on her knees, she cupped her chin in her hands and gazed straight ahead. Fred remained silent. He instinctively felt that speech was unnecessary at that particular moment, and that he was on the eve of the unburdening of a soul. Her next words surprised him.

“Look, Fred, what a magnificent sunset.”
Away facing them in the distance the

golden orb of the sun had almost disappeared behind the range of the Galtee mountains, which clearly distinct, were rapidly changing their colour from mauve to a dark purple. Soon they would become a dark, incoherent, frowning mass. Overhead the scattered, irregular, splashes of fleecy cloudlets were assuming opalescent hues. Sheila watched fascinated until at last the topmost outer edge of the fiery globe seemed to vanish like a flash with incredible rapidity. The western horizon was still aglow, but the sun had disappeared.

"It is truly magnificent," said Fred, breaking the silence at last.

"What always amazes me," replied Sheila, "is the sudden rapidity with which the sun seems to disappear finally. I think a similar rapid change must have occurred within me after the conversation with my father about Major Cathcart. The words 'service to one's country' forcibly took hold of my imagination. The idea seemed to me grand, glorious, and even holy. For the first time I realised that life need not necessarily be a perpetual playing-field, but that it could and ought to become an honourable battle-ground."

"What age were you then?"

"About seventeen."

“Rather serious thoughts for a young girl, weren’t they?”

“I suppose they were, but apart from my time in school the only companions I had ever known were my father, Mabel, and later on Major Cathcart. All three were thorough-going idealists, and all three were seriously inclined. It was only natural that I should be affected by my immediate environment.”

Fred realised the truth of this statement. He himself felt how much he had been influenced by his own father with regard to his views on India.

“Yes, you are quite right,” he replied.

“Environment plays a most important part in one’s life. I must say though that you have been very fortunate.”

“I have been very fortunate indeed. To get back, however, to the main point. It was a curious coincidence that the very first evening on which Mabel arrived the question of my future career cropped up in one of our habitual little causeries. My father suggested that I should go to Oxford. Mabel did not entirely disagree but said that a good deal depended on his intentions with regard to my future.”

"I have no definite intentions," said my father. "I want her to be the arbiter of her own fate, the captain of her soul."

"In that case," replied Mabel, in her usual efficient manner, "perhaps it would be just as well to find out if Sheila herself has any special predilections."

"I should think that Sheila hasn't even yet dreamt about the future. A few years at Oxford will give her balance and poise, and now that we have broached the subject, Sheila will have ample time to decide on her future career."

"I agreed with the suggestion that I should proceed to Oxford for further studies. I had definitely decided in my own mind what was going to be my future career, but I wanted time to think and to plan out the details."

"What career had you decided on?"

"To serve my country."

"Have you changed your mind since?"

"On the contrary the idea has since become a fixed determination. After my first term at Oxford I told my father about my decision, and I asked him to help me with his advice. He became extremely agitated, and walked up and down the room. This astonished me because I think

I had never seen my father moved in such a manner before. I thought I had bitterly disappointed him, and I was filled with compunction and remorse. After a little while he recovered his usual composure and sat down beside me.

“Sheila, my dear, this is a very happy moment in my life. I hoped that you would come to this decision of your own accord. I did not want to influence you in any way, though I would have been disappointed if you had decided otherwise. I have tried to serve my country to the best of my ability, but if I were now to start all over again I would undoubtedly choose a different path. Our country is in crying need of willing and capable leaders. It wants you, and thousands more like you. You will be, I hope, a powerful and influential leader one day.”

I was completely and absolutely flabbergasted. I think there is no other word to describe exactly what I felt. He saw my utter bewilderment, and smiled as he continued:—

“I have watched your up-bringing carefully and I have studied your capabilities and character. You are inherently quick and talented, and you have imagination. You have the potential qualities of a heroine. I am not flattering you. I

am speaking frankly to you in order to encourage your confidence and self-reliance. That was my main reason in sending you to Oxford. Before then you had been all the time in leading strings, even whilst you were at school. I knew that in college you would for the first time in your life have a good deal of freedom and would be able to measure your strength with girls of your own age. Did you find that you were inferior to them in any way?"

"I admitted that I found that I could do most things as well as the other girls but that in the beginning I was rather diffident."

"It is just as I thought," he remarked. "Most subject races have an inferiority complex. You must try to get rid of that unfortunate complex as soon as you possibly can without, at the same time, stepping over to the other extreme of an overweening self-confidence. You have asked me for my advice as to what you should do. My advice is to continue as you are for the present. Make use of every opportunity to improve yourself not only mentally but morally and physically. Do not on that account banish all enjoyment out of your life. The Tommies who went over the top to almost certain death cheerily singing 'It's a

long long way to Tipperary' were far finer heroes than their comrades who lugubriously thought of the glory of dying for their King and Country."

"I have done my best to follow my father's advice. I have finished with Oxford and am now waiting to return to India with my father when the term of his High Commissionership expires."

"When will his term expire?" enquired Fred.

"In about two or three years' time."

"Have you formed any definite plan as yet?"

"Nothing definite as yet. I am keeping in close touch with Indian affairs and in the meantime I am not idle. I have already finished a commercial course, and at present I am taking lessons in Elocution. When those are finished my father has suggested a course in Industry, Statistics, and Organisation with special reference to India. Perhaps you could give me some idea of a line to go upon."

Fred pondered over the problem. Before he left India for his holidays, the country was slowly setting down after the throes of the Civil Disobedience Movement. He realised that this was only a temporary lull in the national struggle for freedom and also that the struggle would

never cease until freedom had been achieved. That freedom would eventually be achieved was to his mind absolutely indubitable. South Africa, the Irish Free State, and Egypt were all direct pointers as to how matters would inevitably proceed. As a matter of fact the principle of freedom had been already accepted. The struggle had now concentrated on the time limit. He couldn't help thinking that selfish vested interests had gone out of their way to create unnecessary misunderstandings.

Sheila broke in on his meditations.

"I am very sorry, Fred. I shouldn't have asked you that question. I forgot for the moment that you are a part of the 'steel frame'."

"So did I too for the moment. That was not the cause of my hesitation in replying to your question. The 'steel frame' is just about as unhappy a political catch-phrase as the 'self-determination of nations' as far as India is concerned. The real cause of my hesitation was an honest endeavour to place you in the welter of Indian present-day politics. From the Terrorists to the Die-hard Reactionaries, which affords a very wide range of varying shades of political opinions, I cannot think of any possible part which would

be suitable for you to play. Politics in any country, even at its best, is a dirty game. What you want is something clean, honest, and straightforward."

"You are quite right. No lasting benefit has ever been achieved by intrigue and chicanery."

"Politics, in its narrower signification, is ruled out of order then?"

"Definitely so."

Fred again meditated over the situation. He reviewed the main incidents of the Civil Disobedience Movement. There were hartals everywhere. There was picketing everywhere. A constant stream of prisoners filled the jails to overflowing. There was excitement, as well as unrest and indiscipline amongst the student community. He suddenly stopped in his meditations:—

"I think I have discovered the germ of an idea," he exclaimed at last.

"What is it?" enquired Sheila anxiously.

"The student community."

"I do not understand."

"I shall try to explain what I mean. It is at present only a plan in dim outline but I think it will not be too difficult to fill in the details. Participation in ordinary politics is out of the

question. What you require is to organise a force which will work honestly, unselfishly, and unwaveringly in the service of the country."

"Where is it possible to find that force at the present day?"

"The force is already there. It is only a question of organisation and a capable leader. I have seen a good deal of the part played by the Indian students in the recent Civil Disobedience Movement. They are all impulsive, unselfish, and generous to a fault. They can be unswervingly loyal to an ideal. It was a thousand pities to see so much of their time and energy wasted, so much of their force misdirected and misspent. Here then is a golden opportunity. It ought not to be a very difficult proposition to harness all that potential energy and direct it along proper and useful channels."

Sheila was forcibly struck with the idea and remained silent for a considerable time thinking out possibilities.

"You are both extraordinarily quiet," said Bannerji, coming up from behind them. His footsteps made no sound on the thick velvety green pile of the lawn.

"I think we are on the verge of finding a

solution to a very difficult problem," replied Sheila.

"What is the very serious problem?" queried Bannerji.

"The problem of my future," replied Sheila.

"That is a very serious problem indeed. I have also thought about it pretty frequently. Do not worry too much. You are doing all you can at present in preparation for whatever may happen. I am optimistic, and I instinctively feel that all your preparations and your talents will not be wasted."

"I am not worrying really, and I am looking forward to the future with all confidence. I told Fred the story of my life, and, forgetting for the moment that he was one of our obnoxious fetters, had the impudence to ask him to suggest the best method of breaking them."

"I do not agree with that statement of the case," remarked Fred smiling. "You are out to serve your country. So am I. You are determined to win freedom for your country. It is the declared policy of the present Government to grant that freedom in due course. Under the circumstances I don't think it is quite fair to call me a fetter. It's a nasty word anyway."

"All right, Fred. I apologise and withdraw the statement, or withdraw the statement and apologise, whichever is the more correct. What word will you substitute?"

Bannerji looked at the two young people in front of him, and pregnant thoughts flashed through his mind.

"How much easier it would be," he reflected, "if the whole intricate problem of India were left to Sheila and Fred. Trivial non-essentials would be discarded without a murmur, and the fundamentals would be discussed in a spirit of friendly appreciation and mutual kindly understanding."

Fred hesitated a while before replying to Sheila's question.

"It is very difficult," he said, "to find a perfectly suitable word, but I should think that 'sign-posts' would probably meet the case."

"Both Sheila and her father looked at him waiting for a further explanation.

"Sign-posts," continued Fred, "to the path of orderly progress and peaceful evolution."

"Doesn't that terminology," asked Sheila, "smack of a certain amount of arrogant superiority?"

"I should rather be inclined to say," rejoined

Fred, "that it showed a confidence founded on a past and varied experience. Take England, for example. Within the last hundred years there has been a practically peaceful transition from a more or less autocratic monarchy to a fully-fledged democracy."

"Ah, but there is a vast difference," said Sheila. "England has always been free, whilst India has not yet achieved her freedom."

"Don't you think that the path to freedom and the path to evolution and progress may very well be identical?"

"Yes, but the 'sign-posts' may possibly indicate a circuitous route which is longer than is either necessary or desirable. It is quite conceivable that there may be many definite and justifiable short cuts."

"It very often happens that the longest way round is the shortest way home."

"Irish, of course, and meaning exactly what?"

"The well-known broad highway is very often the quicker though longer route because it is safe from the morasses and pitfalls of bloodshed and revolution which may easily lie concealed in an unbeaten track across unknown country."

"In other words," interposed Bannerji, "the

present policy is the old motto of 'Festina Lente'. The pace, however, may be aggravatingly slow to an impetuous steed. In any case the whole thing boils down to a simple question of speed, and the only solution is a mutual and sympathetic understanding. By the way what is the verge of the solution with regard to Sheila?"

Fred explained his train of reasoning. He eliminated politics as undesirable, and in the long run, as unstable and inefficient. He thought that Sheila's future might possibly lie in the organisation of an All-India Youth Movement."

"I quite agree with you," responded Bannerji heartily. "I also had already come to the conclusion that politics was out of the question. I had conceived the idea of revitalising the Girl Guide Movement on All-India and National lines, but I thought it would be insufficient and unsatisfactory. The rotting debris would first have to be cleared away, and there would be an unnecessary antagonism from the very outset. I thought that whatever project was to be started should be something new, something clear-cut, and something definitely appealing under modern conditions. I do think that the organisation of an All-India Youth Movement, regardless of sex,

has distinct possibilities, and if successful, would be productive of the most beneficial results in every way."

The dressing-gong sounded and they moved away silently and meditatively to their respective rooms.

The daily routine was often broken. Fred allowed his Russian to lapse and Sheila allowed her father's manuscript to pile up whilst they went for excursions to the various parts of the country. They motored along the East coast through the Sweet Vale of Avoca, and the Valley of the Seven Churches. They saw the wild rugged Connemara with its stone-walled fields and rocky pasture. They visited the rich low-lying country about the estuary of the mighty Shannon, once a desolate waste and now a hive of industry with its gigantic electric installation. They slowly passed through the Golden Vein, including the magnificent Glen of Aherlow, and, last but by no means least, the far-famed Lakes of Killarney.

It was at the Lakes of Killarney that a most peculiar incident occurred. Having ridden through the Gap of Dunloe on the time-honoured donkeys, they descended to the level of the Lakes. Here they were surrounded by a crowd of boatmen

all urging the undoubted superiority and the absurd cheapness of their own particular possession. Sheila, dressed in a sari, attracted more than the usual amount of attention. Suddenly an unexpected diversion was created. A tall dignified grey-haired old man, waving a shillelagh and shouting what must have been very forcible imprecations in the Irish language, dispersed the crowd to a respectful distance. Slipping the Shillelagh under his arm, and doffing his hat in a graceful gesture, he made a gallant and most perfect bow from the hips.

His greeting was absolutely astounding:—

“A hundred thousand welcomes to the land of your forefathers, Princess. It’s meself that will do the honour of escorting you. I know very well where you want to be after going.”

Without waiting for a reply, he turned round to the crowd and shouted:—

“Danny, ye young divil, where are ye? Ye’re always where ye’re not wanted.”

A tall strapping man stepped out from the crowd, and leisurely approached with a beaming smile on his good-humoured countenance.

“Yerra, don’t you see I’m hurrying as fast as me legs can carry me, father.”

"Take the very best boat, and get it ready for the Princess. We're going across to the island."

"Which island? Sure there's thousands of 'em there."

"Yor're as good as ever your mother was with the glib tongue. I'm coming with you and I'll show you the way."

As soon as the boat had got well away from the shore, the old man succeeded in astounding them for the second time. Turning to Sheila, he said:—

"Might I make so bold, Princess, as to ask you to let me have a look behind your left ear?"

Sheila humoured him.

"God be praised," he exclaimed, "if it isn't as I thought, the birth-mark of the O'Rafferties."

Behind Sheila's left ear there had always been a tiny dark brown mole.

"Little did I think" continued the old man, "that I'd live to see this blessed and holy day."

"Is it to the O'Rafferty's island," said Danny quitely, "that ye mane to be going?"

"Man alive," snapped the old man, "where else did ye think I'd be after wanting to carry the Princess?"

Sheila and Fred accepted the situation cheerfully. One boat was as good to them as another,

and from what they had seen the boat in which they found themselves at present was as good as, if not better than, any of the others. In addition the old man seemed to them to be a bit of a local character.

"Sure 'tis true what me mother tould me," said the old man, as if speaking aloud to himself. "Her grandmother tould her that 'twould be twice ten times ten before e'er a descindant of the O'Rafferties would again set foot on the island."

"I should very much like to hear the whole story," suggested Fred in an ingratiating manner.

The old man bent his head in a thoughtful reverie, and became quite oblivious of his passengers and apparently even of his surroundings."

"Lave him alone now," replied Danny, looking up at Fred with a smile. "The divil wouldn't make him open his mouth at the present moment. Ye'll hear the whole of it when ye get to the island whether ye want it or no."

With easy powerful stroke she sent the light craft skimming along the surface of the dark blue waters. The Magillicuddy Recks towered high above them in their massive grandeur.

Danny shipped his oars and straight as an arrow, the boat glided smoothly and silently into

the miniature cove of the island. The old man, with wonderful agility for his age, was the first to step ashore. He courteously assisted Sheila to alight.

The island was the shape of an upturned saucer, and was less than a square mile in area. On the little plateau in the centre were the ruins of, what once must have been, a fairly large building. Thither the old man conducted them.

"It's a wonderful story, Princess, and you'll hardly believe it, but it's as true as you're standing there in front of me. Your great-grandfather, and my great-grandfather were foster-brothers. They were suckled at the same breast. That tie became as sacred and binding to them two as if they were real blood-brothers. They grew up together, and were inseparable. In the end your great-grandfather became a Captain in the Army, and went out of India. He never came back. At first they said he was killed in the Mutiny, but later on the real truth became known. It was his wife and only son that got killed. He himself stayed on in India, and eventually married an Indian Princess."

That evening at dinner Fred related their amusing experience.

“Celtic Romanticism,” observed Justice Smythe.”

Then Bannerji dropped a bomb-shell. For the third time that day Sheila and Fred were astounded.

“Your great-grandfather’s house, Sheila, was known as ‘The Rufftri-Sahib-ki-kothi’. ” (The house of the O’Rafferty.)

CHAPTER FIVE

“The Rastri-Sahib-ki-Kothi.”

It was over seven years ago since these words had been uttered. Many changes had occurred during those seven years.

Justice Smythe and Bannerji were still engaged on their *magnum opus*. Six large volumes had already been printed and published, but the whole scheme outlined twelve volumes in all with a supplementary Index Volume. Justice Smythe was at Garnacanty Castle, but Bannerji had, some five years back, relinquished his High Commissionership and returned to India, where, along with Sheila, he settled down in Tureemapur. Fred, now a fully fledged Collector and District Magistrate, had been posted to Tureemapur a little over a year ago.

When Sheila returned to India with her father she immediately set to work on the foundation and the organisation of the League of Youth. She put her heart and soul into her efforts, and in a very short space of time her efforts were crowned

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When Sheila returned to India with her father she immediately set to work on the foundation and the organisation of the League of Youth. She put her heart and soul into her efforts, and in a very short space of time her efforts were crowned

with success. The time was ripe for such a movement. All the educated youth of the country, both boys and girls, literally flocked to her standard. The procedure she adopted was very simple but very effective. She started with a group of some two hundred boys and fifty girls. These were specially selected candidates from thousands of applications received from all the provinces of India. Then followed one whole year of rigorous, intensive training under her own personal supervision, and at the end of that time two hundred and fifty trained leaders were sent out to the various parts of the country, where branches of the League of Youth were immediately established. The same procedure was continued year after year, so that at the end of four years there were one thousand branches operating enthusiastically and successfully in the principal towns and cities of India.

From the very outset the discipline had been most rigid, and those who succeeded in coming through that one year's severe ordeal might be said to have been well and truly tried. The highest and noblest ideals were inculcated, and the highest and noblest ideal of all, namely the service of their country, was kept constantly be-

fore their eyes. No branch was allowed to be started except by a trained leader, and the trained leaders had to return annually for a short refresher course. In this way Sheila got to know all her trusted lieutenants individually, and succeeded in collecting around her a band of devoted and unselfish workers to each of whom her every wish was a command and her every word a law. Her spirits, her enthusiasm, and her ideals were gradually being spread throughout the length and breadth of the land.

On this particular morning in the beginning of 1939 Sheila happened to be Fred's guest at breakfast.

"Do you know what flashed across my mind just now?" he enquired.

"Do you want me to have three guesses?" queried Sheila.

"You'd never guess it in a thousand years."

"It might save some time if you told me then."

"The Rastri-Sahib-ki-Kothi."

"What put that into your head at this time?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"I remember the evening well, don't you? It was after that glorious day at the Lakes of Killarney. That's many years ago now, isn't it?"

"Over seven years, and yet we don't seem to have changed very much in that time."

"I expect we both have changed a good deal really, but having seen each other practically every year since then, we probably don't notice it. I suppose you are going home this summer."

"I hope to go about April or May. Any chance of your paying a visit to Garnacanty?"

"I'd love to. I know my father has decided on going to England this year, but I am afraid I shan't be able to get away."

"The League of Youth?"

"Yes."

"Aren't things going very well?"

"On the contrary the days, and the months, and the years are not half long enough for me to do what I want to do. By the way it was about the League of Youth that I wanted to have a serious talk with you this morning."

"Yes."

"You remember that both you and my father were dead against my participation in politics."

"Yes, and I still think that it is very sound advice. Politics at the outset means division into parties, whereas your organisation should be one, whole, and undivided."

"I am afraid that there is a danger of our being drawn into the political vortex."

"Why?"

"The League of Youth is being branded by interested parties as a political organisation or even something worse. We may be branded as an unlawful organisation in the near future."

Fred gave the matter his most serious consideration. He saw that Sheila's fear was well founded. He was just as anxious as she herself was that the League of Youth should not be branded as unlawful. He fully believed that it was a good movement, a useful movement, and a disciplined movement. A band of well-disciplined workers, imbued with lofty ideals, was bound to have a most beneficial effect on the uplift and progress of the country. The declared policy of the present Government was the uplift and progress of the country. Consequently he thought himself fully justified in stoutly championing the cause of the League of Youth.

"I do not think," he at length replied, "that there is any such danger at the present moment. To make assurance doubly sure, however, I think I see a way of being able to give you some definite assistance."

"Do please tell me what it is."

"You have patrons of your organisation, I suppose."

"Of course we have."

"Do you think I am a fit and suitable person to become a patron?"

Sheila looked at him with astonishment. She knew that Fred was in sympathy with the League of Youth. As a matter of fact she now recalled that it was he who really originated the idea. Somehow things seemed different in the lawns of Gar-nacanty. There she and Fred were comrades in a congenial atmosphere. Here, however, she could not help feeling that no matter how his sympathies were inclined, he still happened to be one of the cogs in the mighty steel frame. He saw her hesitation and hastily added:—

"Sorry, Sheila. I should not have asked that question."

"Why?"

"In order to be a complete success your organisation must necessarily be non-political and non-sectarian. An official as patron would undoubtedly tend to give it a Government bias."

"You are entirely wrong, Fred. Everyone trusts you, and you are not looked upon as an

official in the ordinary acceptation of the term. That was not the reason why I hesitated."

"What was the reason?"

"I was only thinking of you personally. A time might easily come when your position as patron of the League of Youth would be distinctly awkward."

"I don't see how it can become awkward unless the Government suddenly changes its policy. They are at present spending a lot of money on rural uplift. I am simply going one step farther, and including urban uplift without asking them to spend a single penny. Besides, if there was ever any likelihood of the position becoming awkward in any way, I could always resign."

"If you are satisfied, I am more than satisfied. I should simply love to have you as one of our patrons. Moreover it will be of definite assistance to us. As long as you are with us, we can hardly be labelled as anti-Government."

"It will be also very useful to me," remarked Fred smiling.

"In what way? I can't very well see how it will be useful to you, though I can see that there may be a certain amount of bother and trouble, if you take your position as patron seriously."

Most of the patrons are largely figure-heads."

"I am very conscientious and I am going to take my position very seriously indeed."

"But how is that going to be useful to you?"

"I shall gain much inside knowledge of the working of the organisation."

"Still I don't see how that is going to help you very much."

"If ever the organisation decides to scrap their obnoxious fetters—"

"Now, now, Fred, that's not fair. I retracted those words ages ago."

"Well then, if ever the organisation decides to make bon-fires of their old discarded sign-posts, I shall be the first to get the tip and be able to make an easy get-away."

"You are perfectly beastly this morning."

"Sorry, Sheila. I was only half-ragging."

"What do you mean by half-ragging?"

"I didn't mean what I said about fetters and sign-posts and things, but I do mean to take an honest interest in the organisation. I should like very much to come along and have a look some day."

"Will you really? That will be splendid. Any day at all you like."

“What about Sunday next?”

“Sunday, by all means. Come along and spend the day with us if you can. My father will be delighted to see you.”

“And you?”

Sheila's eyes twinkled as she replied:—

“The Princess will be charmed to have the honour to receive the Collector Sahib.”

“I am afraid the Princess will not have the honour of receiving the Collector Sahib.”

“You're not backing out of it so soon, are you?”

“No. I am coming out all right, but not as the Collector Sahib. I am going to cast aside officialdom and official duties for one day.”

Bannerji's bungalow was situated about two miles outside Tureemapur proper. It was set well back from the road and was approached by a winding drive through well-kept grounds. The house was an old one but it had evidently been built to defy the ravages of time. Its deep verandahs were supported by lofty Ionic pillars and its spacious rooms were cool and comfortable. The grounds attached were extensive and covered a very wide area. As a matter of fact both the house and grounds had a peculiar and interesting

history.

In pre-Mutiny days Turcemapur and its surroundings formed part of a wealthy and prosperous native state. For various reasons, the chief of which were, extravagance, mismanagement, and internecine family feuds, the state dwindled until it became, both in size and revenues, nothing more than a large Zamindari. The last Raja easily surpassed all his predecessors in his riotous way of living and his wanton extravagance. He had no family and, as is usual under those circumstances, he adopted a son and heir. Unfortunately for him the choice was not a happy one. The adopted son turned out to be both ruthless and ambitious. He poisoned the Raja, and set to work to recover by raids and violence the portions of the original state which had either been sold, mortgaged, or forfeited. The Mutiny broke out and he definitely threw in his lot with the mutineers. That was the end. He was killed in battle and his property was confiscated by Government.

The second phase occurred some time after the Mutiny. A large slice of the property was handed over by Government for the housing of a Cavalry Regiment. In those days land was not

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sold by bighas at a prohibitive cost and consequently the lay-out of the cavalry lines was planned in the most generous proportions. Ample space was allotted for parade grounds, rifle ranges, polo-grounds, and recreation grounds. Everything was in the plural number. Bannerji's present bungalow had been the Officer's Mess.

The third phase came after the Great War. Cavalry Regiments were being disbanded and mechanised, and the Turcemapur Cavalry Lines were soon deserted. The Government were only too pleased to grant to Bannerji, an ex-Judge of the High Court, the lease of the place for ninety-nine years at a reasonable rent.

Fred felt like a school-boy going home for the holidays as he started his car for Bannerji's bungalow. Though it was well after eight o'clock there was a distinct nip in the air, and the pearly dew-drops on the grass were glistening and shimmering in the morning sunshine. As he had told Sheila he had shed officialdom and official duties, and he was enjoying in anticipation the pleasures of a care-free day in congenial company.

"Bannerji," he thought to himself, "might very well be a friendly uncle, and Sheila a sympathetic sister."

As he sped up the drive he saw Sheila and her father awaiting his arrival on the top of the doorsteps. They went into breakfast almost immediately.

"I have had a letter from your father by this mail, Fred," said Bannerji. "He has struck another knotty problem in Hindu Law, and he wants me to come along for a lengthened consultation."

"I also had a letter," replied Fred, "and my father has asked me to try and persuade you to make up your mind to come home with me this summer."

"You are definitely going, are you?"

"Definitely, as far as I am concerned. I have applied for leave, and it has been provisionally granted."

"Provisionally?"

"Well, you know the usual old tag, 'if the exigencies of the service permit'. I don't think my absence for three or four months will be liable to create any special exigency. In any case I have booked my passage for April. Would that time suit you?"

"Yes, April would suit very well indeed."

"Well then," exclaimed Fred, "let's all go along together. Garnacanty will be lovely in May, and the Princess and the Nabob will be sure

of a right royal welcome."

"What about it, Sheila?" asked Bannerji, turning to his daughter.

Sheila slowly and sorrowfully shook her head. She remembered with a pang the pleasure she experienced on that May morning when she first drove out to Garnacanty with Fred by her side, her delightful visit to the tenants with her father, her first lesson in canoeing, and the humorous incident on the race-course. She vividly recalled the tall dignified old man at the Lakes of Killarney who, brandishing his shillelagh like a magic wand, instantaneously dispersed the noisy crowd of boatmen, and who later told her the story of the O'Rafferties. The call of the West was strong upon her, but her self-imposed duty in the East was still stronger.

"I am afraid that for me it is impossible," she replied. "Any time I can spare from my personal supervision here at Headquarters, I devote to visiting the various branches which are increasing rapidly. In fact the demand for trained teachers is far more than the supply available."

"All this," remarked Fred, "must involve considerable expense. How is the organisation financed?"

"The finances fortunately have been satisfactorily solved," replied Sheila.

"You are indeed fortunate, because finance is usually the stumbling-block in most organisations."

"It is all due to my father. The initial expenses would have been overwhelming but my father met all and expenditure for the first year, and in addition made us a free grant of all the residential quarters and grounds necessary for the starting of the organisation. Since then the organisation is more than paying its own way."

"Do you charge very high fees?"

"We generally charge according to means with the idea of averaging about twenty rupees per month per individual. That gives us an income of five thousand rupees per month which is more than sufficient to cover the running expenses."

"What about your Instructors?"

"There are only two paid Instructors, namely, a General Captain for the boys, and a Lady Superintendent for the girls. Both the Lady Superintendents and the General Captain have volunteered to work on a nominal salary. The Lady Superintendent is assisted free by the two best girls of the previous year, and the General Captain by the four best boys. These posts of free assistants are eagerly

coveted, and are looked upon as badges, distinction and honour."

"What about the various branches?"

"They are also self-supporting. They receive the Instructors from Headquarters at a nominal salary, and almost in all cases local wealthy patrons have given them generous donations. Some of the branches are quite as well equipped as Headquarters, and all of them are sufficiently well equipped to be able to carry on useful and efficient work."

"I suppose the equipment as well as the training is standardised."

"As far as possible. There are three fundamentals without which no branch can be started. The minimum requirements are first of all residential quarters. Secondly, there must be ample space for recreation grounds including a Swimming Tank and a Gymnasium. Thirdly, a parade ground with rifle range attached. In cases of necessity the recreation grounds and the parade grounds may be combined."

"What are the other requisites for the complete equipment?"

"An Aerodrome and a Broadcasting Station."

"That is a pretty tall order, isn't it? What is

the specific idea underlying the whole scheme?"

"My father is responsible for the specific idea, and also for the details of the whole scheme. He will explain it to you far better than I can."

Fred looked up enquiringly at Bannerji, and the latter smiled in a most friendly manner at Fred as he proceeded to explain in detail the whole situation:—

"You remember, Fred, that you yourself were responsible for the general idea of the League of Youth, or in other words the harnessing of that genuine, unselfish, willing, and self-sacrificing energy for the promotion of the welfare of India. That was the basic idea from which I started. I took stock of the whole situation and gave it my most careful consideration. Everywhere all over the country I saw that wonderful amount of energy frittered away in academic and useless disputations. The educated youth were perfectly right in endeavouring to mobilise their forces, but they were absolutely wrong in their aims and objects. Instead of concentrating their energies on the obvious ideal of working whole-heartedly for their mother-land, they thoughtlessly and selfishly proceeded to start an agitation for the assertion of their rights and privileges. What was the

result? Meetings and more meetings, discussions and acrimonious debates on trivial details. The net results of all their worries and endeavours were futile and irresponsible resolutions. This led me to my first concrete and definite idea that the primary aim of the League of Youth should be 'Facta non-Verba'.

"Once I had come to the conclusion that the welfare of India depended more on action than on speech, the rest was comparatively easy. The youth of the country had to be disciplined and organised with that specific object in view. The various systems of training adopted by other countries, but especially by Italy and Germany, gave me a line to go on, and from them I tried to evolve a system which I thought might be feasible in India. There were a hundred and one difficulties. There was, for example, the question of money. In all the other countries the State spent lavish sums on the education of its youth but nothing could be expected from that source in India. Again the system of training was initiated and sponsored by the State in other countries and in many cases made compulsory. Here, however, the organisation had to be voluntary, and we had to start right from the very beginning

with ridiculously small numbers. In case the numbers did increase and the branches multiply, there was the difficulty of providing a strong central authority which could command instantaneous obedience. I must admit that in the beginning the outlook was not altogether bright. I was optimistic, and Sheila was even still more optimistic. Eventually all those difficulties were overcome, and I think I can say that our optimism was justified."

"I see," remarked Fred, "how you have successfully competed with the difficulties of organisation and finance, but how have you managed with regard to the central authority?"

"Just one moment," interrupted Sheila. "I think I'll leave you two together to finish the story. I'll run along and change. We've got to be on the parade ground at ten-thirty sharp."

Both men stood up and affectionately watched slim, sari-clad figure move gracefully out of the room. When they had sat down again, Bannerji continued:

"The question of the central authority solved itself. It is wonderful how many difficulties do solve themselves in marching on in a determined fashion to a definite objective. There was no

difficulty for the first year when we had only the Headquarters. Sheila was the sole authority. When the branches did increase, Sheila still remained the sole unquestioned authority. She has a wonderful influence, a kind of personal magnetism over all those who come here, and all the branches unanimously requested that they should remain in close touch with her, and be under her sole direct control. They all look upon her as something far above and beyond them, as something inspired and almost divine."

"This must mean a tremendous strain. How does she manage to keep in direct touch with all the branches?"

"It is indeed a tremendous strain but she doesn't seem to feel it. She keeps in direct touch with all the branches in two ways. Firstly, all trained leaders who pass out, come back to Headquarters once a year for at least a week, sometimes longer, if they can manage it. Secondly, Sheila herself makes it a point of paying a personal annual visit to every branch. She never forgets the name or face of a leader."

"How many branches are there at present?"

"Roughly about a thousand."

"And how many does each branch turn out

annually?"

"The maximum for any one branch is the same as Headquarters, namely, two hundred youths and fifty girls. Most of the branches are turning out the maximum."

"You are turning out about fifty thousand potential leaders in one year, or in other words, you have turned out almost a quarter of a million since you started five years ago."

"Yes, that is a fairly correct estimate."

"I know that the general idea of the League of Youth is the welfare of the country, but you seem to have got down to a special objective on preconceived lines."

"You are right. The motto of the organisation makes it sufficiently explicit."

"What is the motto of the League of Youth?"

"Paratus ad Omnia."

CHAPTER SIX

"Paratus ad Omnia," repeated Fred enquiringly. "I am afraid that leaves me still somewhat in the dark. Couldn't you give me some more details?"

"I'll give you all the details you require, but not just now. The explanation will take some time, and Sheila will probably be along at any moment to rush you off for a hectic day. I expect I won't see very much of you before evening."

At that very moment Sheila entered the room.

"I think we ought to start, Fred, if you are ready."

Fred looked up in astonishment. The transformation had been sudden and complete. Sheila stood before him no longer in the graceful clinging folds of a silk sari but in the uniform of the League of Youth. His mind travelled rapidly back to the first time he had met Sheila on the village platform at Garnacanty. He visualised her again in her bathing costume in the canoe, and in her riding kit on the race-course. Here was something

totally and entirely different. Black blouse open at the neck with a short black skirt and black stockings. Soft white ankle-boots and a smart white forage cap with thin black piping. A white monogram of the initial letters of the motto stood out in bold relief on the left centre of the blouse.

This was a Sheila he had never seen before. She radiated smartness, efficiency and personality. He was struck again by the peculiar whiteness of her skin, rendered perhaps still more marked by the masses of raven-black glossy hair plaited and neatly coiled round her well-shaped head. Her name and the colour of her eyes also had caused him no little surprise when first they met. The large eyes, set well apart beneath a broad brow, were grey-blue, more blue than grey in her softer moments, and more grey than blue, as they were at present, when she was serious and determined.

"Sheila of the blue eyes, and black hair," thought Fred.

The words 'The Rastri-Sahib-ki-Kothi' again flashed through his mind. That, of course, must be the obvious explanation. No wonder she was looked upon by others as something apart, something different. Her striking appearance and personal

magnetism must have exercised an almost hypnotic influence. She had all the gifts and qualifications of a born leader. The sincere love of her country and the enthusiasm, amounting almost to a passionate zeal, which she displayed in all her work, must have been readily recognised by her youthful followers, who responded by not only willingly acknowledging her as their actual leader, but also by adopting her as their beloved and inspired heroine.

"Quick change artist," remarked Fred with an appraising smile. "That's rather a smart uniform."

"I am glad you like it, because I meant it to be smart. My primary consideration, however, was efficiency. There is no point in not combining smartness with efficiency whenever possible."

"I quite agree. What kind is the programme going to be like? It is always interesting to know beforehand."

"Sunday is an off-day. There is a general parade at ten-thirty, and this is followed by a general inspection of the barracks. I thought you might like to come along and see both the parade and the inspection. It will also give me an opportunity of introducing the company

to their new patron. We ought to be finished by twelve-thirty. After lunch I should like to take you to one of our outlying branches which was only started last year. You will have an opportunity of comparing the new with the old."

"What branch are you going to see, Sheila?" asked the father.

"Rumballa."

"Rumballa," exclaimed Fred. "That is about a hundred miles away."

"Just under the hundred," replied Sheila. "I'll take you in my plane. We can start at two o'clock and get there by three. An hour at Rumballa will be quite sufficient and we'll be back here about five for tea."

"I said you were going to have a hectic day, Fred," laughed Bannerji, as he saw them off at the door.

Sheila drove Fred in her own car to the parade ground which was not very far away. The company was already drawn up prepared for inspection when they arrived. The four platoons of boys were in open column with the platoon of girls on the right of number one platoon. The girls all wore the same uniform as Sheila. The boys wore white shirts with khaki shorts and stockings,

soft brown ankle-boots and khaki forage caps with thin white piping. A black monogram of the initial letters of the motto stood out in bold relief on the left centre of the white shirts. Fred admired their smart and workman-like appearance.

Sheila introduced him to the Lady Superintendent and the General Captain. The Lady Superintendent was middle-aged and stoutish, but she was active and energetic and wore her uniform well. The General Captain, Umrao Singh by name, had been an officer in the Indian Army. He was not quite as tall or as broad as Fred but, like Fred, he was perfectly proportioned. Broad shoulders tapered down to a narrow waist which rested firmly on strong slender hips. Sheila could not help unconsciously contrasting two splendid specimens of physical excellence. Fred, tall, fair, with laughing blue eyes, and an easy, almost nonchalant manner. Umrao Singh, stiffly upright with his swarthy complexion and dark flashing eyes. She could also not help noticing the contrast between the way Fred was received by the Lady Superintendent and the General Captain. The Lady Superintendent received him cordially and even enthusiastically. Captain Umrao Singh's attitude was distinctly defensive, if not suspiciously aggressive.

As Fred walked round the ranks two things impressed him forcibly. The first was that he was definitely the visitor. Secondly, every single individual was on his or her toes, anxious to meet with approval, and even thoroughly contented if no fault were found. Sheila was like a priestess amongst her devotees. As soon as the inspection was over Sheila stood in front of the company and motioned Fred to her side. The Lady Superintendent and the General Captain took post.

"Parade," rapped out Sheila in a clear ringing voice.

The company came to attention with a meticulous precision that would have done credit to any regular battalion.

"Your turn-out this morning was excellent, as it always has been and as it always ought to be. I am proud of you."

There was not the slightest movement in the ranks but Fred noticed that the eyes which looked absolutely straight to the front sparkled with a glowing sense of satisfaction.

"Parade," ordered Sheila, "Stand at ease."

The order was carried out with the same precision as before.

Sheila then advanced a few paces and addressed the company:—

“This morning I want to introduce to you a new patron, Mr. Smythe, the Collector and District Magistrate of Turcemapur. He has been my friend and my father’s friend for very long time. He is no stranger to this country. His father served India for thirty years or more, and he himself was born in these very provinces. Service to the country is in his blood. As a matter of fact many years ago, in a beautiful land very far away from here, it was he who first formulated the general idea of the League of Youth. Now for the first time he sees for himself that idea translated into action. I hope he is pleased with what he has seen.

“I should like to remind you again this morning of the solemn vow you made when you first joined the League of Youth, namely, that you would devote your lives to the welfare of your country. Mr. Smythe is also devoting the best part of his life to the welfare of India. Many roads lead to Delhi. There are many methods of service. What matters the road, what matters the method, so long as we all march steadily to the common goal, the uplift and regeneration of

our country, the freedom and independence of India.

"I shall now proceed to invest our new patron with the badge of the League of Youth."

She turned round and proceeded to pin on the lapel of Fred's coat a black and white silver disc embodying the monogram of the motto of the organisation. As she did so, she whispered:—

"Welcome, Fred. This gives me intense pleasure. I am very happy to-day."

"Me too," was the whispered reply.

The left fingers fastening the badge trembled ever so slightly when she looked into Fred's eyes and heard his whispered reply. Her face was flushed and her eyes were sparkling as she turned round to call for three cheers for their new patron.

The incident did not last more than five seconds in all. Though the eyes of the whole parade were centred on the little group of two, only one individual remarked anything significant in the ceremony. Captain Umrao Singh alone observed the whispered colloquy and the flushed face and the sparkling eyes of the Commandant.

Fred acknowledged the cheers by taking off his topee, and then, at the request of Sheila, addressed

the company:—

“I am no good at making a speech. In fact I never do when I can possibly avoid it. I personally believe that a single chitak of action is worth maunds and maunds of words, though I’ll admit, of course, that words are sometimes necessary. Your Commandant has asked me to say a few words to you. The words will be very few but they will be sincere and genuine. Your appearance this morning on parade was—I’m afraid I’ll have to borrow a word from your Commandant—excellent, very excellent indeed, and I am extraordinarily pleased with what I have seen so far. I also may truthfully say that I consider it both an honour and a privilege to be enrolled as a patron of the League of Youth.

“I am not going to be a *nam-ke-waste* (nominal) patron. I am determined to help your organisation in every way I can because I honestly believe in it. I’ll tell you why. India is in the beginning of a transition stage, the most difficult of all stages for any country, and she will require leaders, numerous leaders of the right sort. You will be the future leaders and I think you are being trained in the right way. You are learning the lessons of organisation and discipline but

especially the lesson of obedience, implicit obedience to an ideal. Obedience is just as necessary in the leaders as in the rank and file."

Fred hesitated for a moment as if he were at a loss for a word. Then he smiled at Sheila and continued:—

"I know your Commandant. We have been friends, as she has told you, for many years. You are fortunate. I can easily imagine from what I have seen that you will find implicit obedience to her a very easy task, and from what I know personally, I feel confident that you will always be led honestly, sincerely, and fearlessly.

"May I take the liberty of offering to you one tiny little word of advice. All can not have the same opportunities as you have for training and discipline. Remember in your dealing with others to be just and reasonable, tolerant and charitable. Remember, as I told you in the beginning, that one small act of good example is far more efficacious than hundreds of dogmatic and barren precepts.

"I sincerely thank you all."

The parade ground was in the form of a square surrounded on all sides by blocks of buildings facing inwards. On the south side were the

Library, Reading Room, Lecture Rooms, and Broadcasting Station. On the west side were the residential quarters for the girls, including the quarters of the Lady Superintendent. Directly behind were the recreation grounds. On the east side were the residential quarters for the boys and the General Captain and directly behind were the playing fields. The north side were occupied with Gymnasium and the Swimming Tank. East and West were separate entities, but North, South, and Centre were common to all. At the back of the North block was a long stretch of level ground which served as an aerodrome. The aerodrome was bounded by a rifle range at one end and at the other end by a hangar.

"Come along," said Sheila, "and we'll have a look at the South Block whilst they are dispersing to their quarters."

The Library was well stocked with books, and the Reading Room was spacious and comfortable, as were also the Lecture Rooms. Fred took a great interest in the Broadcasting Station which was fitted up with all the latest gadgets.

"What is the idea in having a Broadcasting Station," asked Fred as they proceeded to the West Block to inspect the residential quarters

of the girls.

"There are the usual advantages of any Broadcasting Station," replied Sheila, "but its biggest asset here is that it helps to remove individual inferiority complex, and also inspires energy and enthusiasm."

"In what way?"

"Many of the boys and girls come from villages and small towns. The size of these Headquarters even appear enormous to them in the beginning. They feel almost lost. When they think of India as a whole they feel puny and helpless, and are inclined to think that even their very best efforts cannot be of any great importance. With the aid of Broadcasting not only India but the whole world is made to appear to them comparatively small, and consequently they are easily led to believe that the efforts of every single individual have a distinct significance."

"That point of view never struck me before," rejoined Fred, "but it is perfectly obvious. The smaller the world becomes through improvements in scientific communication, the more significant and important becomes the part played by the individual."

The Lady Superintendent met them at the

entrance to the residential quarters.

"I suppose I remain outside here," said Fred, "until this little lot is finished."

"Why?" queried Sheila. "Have you any objection to seeing the quarters or the girls or both?"

"I haven't the slightest objection. In fact I was hoping to be allowed to enter the portals. I am rather curious."

"Do please come in, Mr. Smythe," invited the Lady Superintendent. "The girls will be delighted to show you how good they are, and they are really good."

"The eternal vanity of the female," laughed Fred.

"I think that you are wrong in this particular case, even though I know you are only ragging" smiled Sheila. "Every effort is being made to put a stop to any kind of foolish vanity but a justifiable pride in work is always encouraged."

The girls were divided into groups of ten, including the Group Leader, and to each group was assigned a dormitory. They stood to attention by their beds as the Commandant passed along accompanied by the Group Leader. There was plenty of space and air in the dormitories but

no effeminate luxuries. They were spartan in their simplicity. A nawar bed with blankets and a bolster none too soft. The blankets were folded neatly at the end of each bed according to a regulation pattern. There were no sheets or pillowcases.

"Everything is done by themselves," explained the Lady Superintendent to Fred. "They make their own beds and are responsible for the cleanliness and the orderliness of their dormitories. They encourage a spirit of healthy competition, a certificate of honour is given to the inmates of the best dormitory at the end of the year. Marks are allotted at the weekly inspection, so that those who want to compete for the coveted certificate of honour must start right away from the very beginning."

"I expect it is rather difficult to assign marks occasionally."

"Towards the end of the year it is almost impossible to differentiate between any of the dormitories. Marks lost in the beginning of the year are almost impossible to recover."

"Those who have lost a good many marks in the beginning may be inclined to become slack."

The Lady Superintendent looked at Fred in

a kind of pitying amazement as she replied.—

“I am afraid you do not understand the atmosphere prevailing here, Mr. Smythe. The faintest mark of disapproval from the Commandant is a disgrace not to be wiped out even by the acquisition of the most coveted badge of honour.”

Fred began to realise more and more the extraordinary influence wielded by Sheila over all those with whom she came in contact. It was not merely the result of her natural gifts and specialised training. There was something much more, something incalculable and indefinable. He thought that he himself had experienced something of that influence a very short while ago when she whispered to him her happiness as she pinned on the lapel of his coat the badge of the League of Youth. The almost imperceptible trembling of her left fingers gave him an unaccountable thrill.

“I think I am beginning to understand,” he quietly replied.

The inspection of the dormitories was quickly over. Sheila had something to say to each Group Leader but Fred was too far behind to hear the actual words. They had a cursory glance at the recreation grounds which consisted of a hockey

field and some Badminton courts.

"We'll cut across now to the East Block," said Sheila. "I do not want them uselessly standing to attention for longer than is absolutely necessary."

Captain Umrao Singh met them at the entrance. There was the same arrangement for the boys except that the dormitories were larger and each group consisted of twenty. The inspection was likewise carried out in the same manner. Each boy stood to attention by his bed as the Commandant passed along. The playing fields of the boys comprised two hockey fields and several volleyball courts. Fred noticed that here too Sheila had always something to say to each Group Leader but he also noticed something very different. During the inspection of the residential quarters of the girls the Lady Superintendent chatted in a free and friendly manner with him as they walked behind the Commandant and the Group Leader. Captain Umrao Singh walked beside him silent as the tomb, and completely unaware of his existence. He never let his eyes once waver from the figure of the Commandant in front of him. Every movement, every gesture, every word was followed with a tense concentrated

expression which Fred endeavoured to analyse.

"Here," thought Fred, "is something more than ordinary zeal, devotion and loyalty."

He continued to watch him carefully and then suddenly the obvious solution dawned on him. Captain Umrao Singh was in love with Sheila. This discovery caused him distinct irritation and annoyance. A shadow shrouded happiness of an otherwise perfect day. The end of the inspection, however, soon dispersed the fleeting shadow of unhappiness.

"Excellent, as usual, Umrao Singh."

Umrao Singh clicked his heels and smartly saluted.

"Thank you, Commandant."

"By the way I shall want my plane at two o'clock this afternoon. I am taking Mr. Smythe to see the detachment at Rumballa. Will you see that everything is ready, please?"

"Very good, Commandant."

"I hope to be back about five o'clock. Good-morning, Umrao Singh."

Fred could see nothing in this exchange but the willing obedience of the subordinate and the courteous condescension of the Commandant. That was a barrier which Umrao Singh would

never cross without Sheila's acquiescence, and he somehow felt convinced that Sheila's acquiescence would not be forthcoming. Everything was as it should be for the present. He could not very well blame Umrao Singh for falling in love with Sheila. His irritation and annoyance changed to pity and compassion.

Sheila looked at her watch and found that it was after twelve o'clock.

"We'll just have time," she said, "to have a glimpse at the Swimming Tank and the Gymnasium. You'll see the aerodrome in the afternoon."

They crossed over to the North Block. The Swimming Tank was covered and raised well above the level of the ground. The water, when emptied, was used to flood the playing fields and the parades ground, so that the grass lawns were always kept in good condition. The Gymnasium was built on rather an extensive scale in order to provide a covered parade ground during inclement weather.

As they were driving back to lunch Sheila outlined the daily routine:—

"Sunday, of course, is a kind of an off day. After the parade and the inspection they are free to do as they like. This gives them an opportunity

of framing their own programmes and also teaches them a certain amount of initiative. The remaining days of the week are pretty well filled up and there is very little free time."

"What do they do as a rule when left to themselves?"

"Various things. Outfits are repaired, diaries are written up, and the surrounding country is well explored both on bicycle and on foot. At the end of the year there is scarcely a spot within a radius of twenty miles which has not been traversed at some time or other."

"What is the ordinary day like?"

"Pretty strenuous. There is the reveille at five in the morning. At seven o'clock the general roll-call is followed by Physical Training which is common. From eight to eleven the boys and girls are separated. The boys are put through a practical course of military training comprising drill, signalling, and musketry. The girls are put through a practical course of domestic economy and Red Cross work. Between two and three-thirty there are lectures in connection with the practical work of the following day, and from four to six, there are compulsory games. Lights out at nine o'clock. Whenever

possible, as it is here at Headquarters, wireless and flying are introduced into the curriculum."

"That is pretty strenuous indeed, but there seem to be three fairly long gaps, namely from five to seven, from eleven till two, and from six to nine."

"Those gaps are more apparent than real. First of all there is the question of food. There is a light meal at six-thirty, and one of their two principal meals at eleven-thirty. Again some light refreshment at three-thirty, and their second meal is at seven o'clock in the evening. You must remember that there are no servants. All the arrangements for cooking, attendance, and washing-up are managed by themselves. Sweepers and dhobies are allowed in the beginning but even those are gradually eliminated."

"They scarcely have time to breathe."

"Oh yes, they have," laughed Sheila. It is wonderful how quickly things get done by enthusiasm and willing co-operation. There is never any undue haste or worry but there is no time for loitering or day-dreaming."

"As Jim the Stationmaster in Garnacanty would say, 'sure there's plenty of time but if you don't hurry on, you'll be late.'"

"Or words to that effect, as they say in the Army," rejoined Sheila.

Lunch was a very cheery meal. Fred delighted the heart of Sheila and also of her father by his encomiums on all that he had seen during the morning. The talk easily switched on to Garnacanty, and Fred delighted them still more by retailing in the Irish vernacular the solicitous enquiries about the Princess and the Nabob.

"Come along, Fred," said Sheila, jumping up from the table. "Punctuality is the thief of time."

"I never thought of it in that light before but, of course, you do undoubtedly down the blighter by stealing a march on him."

"By the way, Fred," enquired Bannerji, "You're not nervous by any chance?"

"Of what in particular?"

"Flying, for example."

Fred laughed.

"I just barely succeeded in being old enough to get a commission in the Air Force a few months before the end of the Great War."

CHAPTER SEVEN

On the way to the aerodrome Sheila remarked:—

“I did not know you had been in the Air Force during the War.”

“Only for a very short time. I joined up in March 1918. Things weren’t going very well for us at that time, and the Recruiting Authorities were not very exacting about ages provided the standard measurements were duly satisfied. I wasn’t quite seventeen but I easily succeeded in coming up to the necessary requirements with regard to height, chest measurement, and general physical fitness. As a matter of fact I looked more like nineteen than seventeen and that was a distinct help. I had received a preliminary warning to hold myself in readiness as my name was on the next list for service abroad. I was never called upon. The War ended in November.”

“Were you glad or sorry?”

“Now I am definitely glad that the War did come to an end and I also think that it lasted four

years too long. It should never have been started. Then, however, I was just as definitely sorry, as were all the other youngsters in the same batch. We thought we had been treated badly at the hands of fortune and that we were very unlucky the War had come to an end so soon."

"You must have been a very bloodthirsty young lot."

"Do you know I don't think we were really. We never allowed our minds to dwell on the harrowing details of crashing 'planes, destruction, and death. We concentrated rather on the glory of service. We were all at the romantic stage, or age, if you prefer to call it by that name, and all more or less idealists. Most of our day-dreams and ambitions were focussed on thrilling adventures and hair-breadth escape."

"Now I suppose you have developed into a hardened materialist."

"My daily routine and lack of leisure are doing their best to make me one but, so far, I think I have successfully stood the strain. I still try to cling to my own ideas and ideals in the midst of a cramping and soul-destroying environment. This morning has been the most revivifying tonic I have experienced for ever such a long time."

Sheila drove on for a while in silence. She also had an electrifying experience that morning. She was absolutely calm and cool on parade until the moment she turned round to pin the badge of the League of Youth on the lapel of Fred's coat. She had meant to perform the simple ceremony in a dignified silence but at the last moment something beyond her control compelled her to whisper to him her happiness. The intimate proximity of pinning on the badge and even still more so, the look that accompanied the whispered reply thrilled her to the core. Fred's sudden and unexpected question now aroused her from a pleasant reverie.

"What kind of a fellow is Umrao Singh?"

"Umrao Singh," repeated Sheila, half dazed for the fraction of a second and wondering what was the association of ideas that made such a question possible. His definite denial of materialism and his endeavour under difficulties to adhere to his romantic ideals added a second thrill.

"Could it be possible," she thought in an unguarded moment, "that Fred is jealous?"

She immediately brushed the idea aside as absolutely ridiculous.

"Don't be a fool," she said to herself. "Give up foolish day-dreams and get down to realities. Fred is a sincere friend. He is genuinely interested in the League of Youth and is naturally anxious to obtain first-hand information about all those who hold responsible positions."

"Yes," rejoined Fred. "I must admit that he strikes me as very capable and efficient."

"He is extraordinarily efficient and capable and he gets on very well with the recruits."

"How did you manage to get hold of him?"

"In the usual way, by advertising. Though we offered only a very small salary we had hundreds of applications and what is more surprising still, very many applicants offered to give their services free. Umrao Singh also volunteered to give his services free and as he was easily the most outstanding of all the other candidates with regard to qualifications, we asked him to come along for an interview."

"We?" queried Fred.

"It's not the royal 'we', Fred," laughed Sheila. "I'm not conceited, at least not more so than I ever was before. I meant, of course, my father and myself. Umrao Singh's appearance and behaviour at the interview equalled his qualifica-

tions which were very excellent indeed."

"What kind is his previous history like?"

"He passed out from Sandhurst high up on the list and having spent a year with a British Battalion, was posted to the Rajputs. He remained with the Regiment until he obtained his Captaincy and a series of misfortunes, over which he had no control, compelled him to send in his resignation. First of all his elder and only brother died and he was summoned home peremptorily. His father was a wealthy Zamindar and a Rajput of the old school. He ruled his family with a rod of iron and Umrao Singh never even dreamt for a single moment of disobeying the parental mandate. The death of his son preyed on the old man's mind and within a year he himself was buried."

"I don't see why Umrao Singh had to resign his commission if he was very keen on his profession."

"Thereby hangs a significant little tale. The old man had been a staunch loyalist as had been his father before him. Within recent years a slow but gradual change had occurred in his outlook. During the political troubles rent was difficult, and at times almost impossible, to collect from the tenants but the revenue collected by the

Government remained fixed and unalterable. This, the old man thought, was a decided injustice, and he naturally nursed a legitimate grievance. Smarting under this he became more susceptible than he otherwise would have been to the clarion call of the Congress. He began to recognise that the British Government was after all a foreign government and on his death-bed he exacted a promise from Umrao Singh that he would devote his life and his property to the service of India."

As Fred listened he recognised the truth of the significant little tale. It was not an isolated case. Many Zamindars had loyally and faithfully served the British Government. They understood the enormous advantages conferred by a peaceful and stable rule. Times were changing rapidly. India was caught in the maelstrom of the world-wide state of flux. The old and established order was beginning to show obvious signs of totterings if not of actually collapsing. Doubt and anxiety, vacillation and uncertainty, were rampant everywhere. The bug-bear of compromise made matters even still worse. Loyal friends were alienated by a tendency to appease openly-avowed enemies.

The subject of this conversation was standing

to attention at the hangar when Fred and Sheila arrived. The 'plane was ready for an immediate start.

"Sorry, Umrao Singh," said Sheila. "I did not mean to put you to the bother of coming down here. I thought you would pass on the order."

"It is no bother, Commandant, and besides I personally wanted to see that everything was all right."

"Thank you very much, Umrao Singh," replied Sheila climbing into the pilot's seat.

Fred, with the eye of an expert watched the take-off which was perfect. Sheila after short circles to gain height and position steered straight for Rumballa which they reached in just under the hour. The detachment was on parade, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Commandant. All eyes were turned upwards to catch the first glimpse of the black and white 'plane in the sky, and never left it until it taxied gracefully to halt less than a hundred yards from where they were stationed.

Sheila was received by the Lady Superintendent and the General Captain to whom she introduced Fred. She then inspected the parade and gave them a short exhilarating address, conclud-

ing by saying:—

“Remember the motto of the League of Youth, ‘Paratus ad Omnia’. Repeat it to yourselves when you first wake up in the morning. Repeat it again to yourselves when at the end of a strenuous day you are composing yourselves to rest at night. Repeat it to yourselves at odd moments throughout the day. When the year comes to a close I confidently expect that each one of you will be qualified to live up to that motto. You are now in the course of preparation. It is a hard preparation, and it is designedly hard so that those only will pass out from here who are fit in every way to take up the responsible position of leadership. There may be times when some of you will feel down-hearted, discontented, and depressed. On such occasions let your minds dwell on the glorious cause to which you have devoted your lives. Work on doggedly and determinedly. It may be a source of consolation to you to remember then that your country does not expect the impossible but it does expect and demand the best that is in each of you.”

The grounds were not as extensive as at Headquarters. The parade ground also served as the recreation ground for the girls, and the

boys had their playing fields in the aerodrome. Moreover the buildings were not complete. The residential quarters were finished. Also the Reading Room and most of the Lecture Rooms. There was no Broadcasting Station. The Swimming Tank and the Gymnasium were under process of construction. They had a spacious expanse of country for the aerodrome but as yet there were no planes. There were signs everywhere of an invigorating enthusiasm and a stirring, virile, pushing life.

At Headquarters the word had got round that the Commandant would be coming back to the aerodrome about five o'clock. Long before that time the boys and girls had collected in little groups about the hangar scanning the sky for her expected approach. The drone of the engine, clearly distinct in the still winter atmosphere, heralded her advent. Very soon the black and white 'plane was sighted. The tiny speck gradually loomed larger and eventually spiralled to the ground with the effortless ease and grace of a golden eagle gliding in the heights above deep mountain valleys.

As soon as Sheila climbed out of the 'plane there was a tremendous ovation. She walked

towards the little groups who immediately formed themselves into an orderly circle around her. She related to them the news from the Rumballa detachment and the details were listened to with rapt attention. Fred watched the proceedings with a kind of fascination. The tall slim figure in her dapper uniform surrounded by her admiring smartly-clad company formed a very pleasing and animated picture.

"It seems to me, he thought, that this enthusiastic band has translated the abstract love of country into a concrete idolised worship of a beloved heroine."

After tea at the bungalow, Sheila stood up, remarking:—

"You are staying on for dinner, of course, Fred, aren't you?"

"I'm sorry I can't, Sheila, much as I should like to. I am dining with the Commissioner this evening."

"Anyhow you need not leave for some time yet. I have some urgent correspondence to deal with but I shall come back as soon as I can. I am sure you and my father will find plenty to say to each other in the meantime."

"I haven't had much chance of saying anything

so far," said Bannerji smiling.

"Neither, I'm afraid, has Fred," laughed Sheila. "Well you both can have your innings now undisturbed."

The two men smiled at each other as Sheila went out of the room with easy, swinging, energetic strides.

"How does she manage to keep going?" enquired Fred.

"She is perfectly fit and she loves her work. I think it is a splendid example of 'The labour we delight in, physics pain.'"

"She has got a magnificent show running here and at Rumballa, which was only started a short time ago, absolutely surprised me. The work must be enormous. She is the sole connecting authority between the Lady Superintendents and the General Captains in over one thousand branches and in addition she is the undisputed head of the whole organisation which must involve multifarious and pressing problems of all kinds. Take the case of my own work, for example. I have charge of only one district but Sheila's jurisdiction spreads over the whole of India. My files alone are quite sufficient to keep me going all day and sometimes even part of the night but they

can't be anything like the extent of her correspondence."

"Her correspondence is practically negligible."

"How is that possible? Even if she received only one letter a week from each of the various branches it would mean nearly two hundred letters a day."

"I doubt if she receives even one hundred letters in a month. She has her office, and it is her office and her office alone. There are no personal assistants, no stenographers, no accountants, no typists, no recorders, and no dispatchers. Still she has her finger on the pulse of the whole organisation and the organisation is running smoothly and perfectly."

"This is almost incredible."

"Superficially yes, but the obvious formula on which the organisation is based renders it ridiculously simple."

"And the formula is?"

"Trust."

"I still do not understand."

"As an example I'll take the case of your own work. You hold a responsible post, don't you?"

"Yes, I do."

"To what extent exactly are you trusted?"

Fred hesitated a while before replying. This question of trust had always been a sore point with him. From the very beginning of his service he found himself tied hand and foot by codes, rules, and regulations. Practically no initiative was allowed. A good deal of valuable time was wasted in making sure that a foot-note to a sub-clause of a minor division of one of the multitudinous larger divisions of one of the innumerable fundamental rules was not violated. Occasionally the proper interpretation of an insignificant foot-note led to voluminous and even acrimonious correspondence.

"The irreducible minimum," he replied with a certain amount of bitterness. "A futile attempt has been made to compile all possible and imaginable contingencies with their solutions in a book of words. Times are changing rapidly but the book of words remains as unalterable as the book of fate."

"That alone must involve a good deal of correspondence."

"Of course it does. It also involves a good deal of waste of valuable time along with a useless dissipation of energy in an endeavour to keep

cool, especially in the hot weather. By the way did you ever hear the story of the loss of the 'First Reminder'?"

"I don't think I did."

"Once upon a time there was a senior Collector in charge of a very large district. He knew his district well and he liked it. The people in the district liked him too, because he was human and unconventional. He never made mountains out of mole-hills, and he trusted his common sense rather than the book of words. At his own bungalow in his dak one morning he found a registered letter addressed to him by name and marked personal. Ripping open the cover he found a sealed envelope marked secret and confidential. It was a request to send on to Government an immediate explanation as to why Fundamental Rule 575, Section 109, Sub-clause 37(z) had been contravened. He was also requested to see the foot-note in this connection. He had privately settled a law suit by a compromise which was gladly accepted by both the parties. If the law case had been proceeded with, the result, no matter which way the verdict went, would in all probability have led to a very serious consequence in regard to the peace of his district.

After due deliberation he tore up the communication into tiny scraps, and placed them cheerfully in the waste-paper basket. In due course, after a couple of months he received another registered, secret and confidential letter, which was blatantly marked on the top in red ink and in block capitals, 'First Reminder.' Again the communication was torn into tiny scraps and cheerfully consigned to the waste-paper basket. After another couple of months the second reminder made its appearance. The Collector now decided that it was high time to take a hand in the little game. He regretted to have to inform Government that the 'First Reminder' did not seem to have been received by his office, and kindly requested that the despatch of the same might be verified.

"The ball was now set merrily a-rolling and the game started in right down earnest. The two offices, never on friendly terms, were immediately up in arms, and they determined to rebut with justifiable recrimination the unwarranted accusation of inefficiency and incompetence. The Secretariat pointed out in terms of pitying sarcasm that a mistake could not possibly have occurred in their office. The dispatcher, who had been in the service of the Government for more than

fifteen years, was one of their most tried and trusted servants. The Collector's office retorted that their recorder had literally grown old in the service of the Government and was never yet known to have made even a single mistake in his unselfish and praiseworthy devotion to duty which had lasted for well-nigh a quarter of a century."

"The swollen-headed sods in the Secretariat," said the Collector's office.

"The ignorant incompetent fools in the mofussil," shrieked the Secretariat.

"The Collector's office, confident in their righteous indignation, made an unfortunate faux pas. They suggested that the simplest and most obvious course was to refer the matter to the Post Office authorities for verification. By this time the correspondence had been going on for many months, and the Post Office authorities took many more months to trace out the details of a single registered letter which was alleged to have been posted the best part of a year before. 'Magna est veritas et prevalebit.' The receipt for the registered letter which contained the now famous 'First Reminder' was eventually produced by the Post Office authorities but unfortunately the signature was illegible.

“The Collector’s office was in the dumps. The Secretariat crowed but not for very long. The Collector personally took up the matter and corresponded direct with the Head of the department concerned. He took full responsibility for the mistake which had unfortunately occurred. The letter in question had never really been received in his office. It had come in his personal dak. He had very carefully put it away, so carefully in fact, that he was never able to find it again. He tendered the most profuse apologies for any insinuations made unwittingly and unconsciously, but under the peculiar circumstances, somewhat excusable and suggested that as the efficiency of the office was no longer in question and also as the matter in hand had been unavoidably and unconscionably protracted, the incident might be considered as satisfactorily closed. The Head of the department concerned thanked his stars that the beastly affair had been settled once and for all and heartily agreed with the motion for closure.”

“What happened about the explanation called for with regard to the contravention of the regulations?”

“That, as the Collector definitely intended,

had been successfully side-tracked to an academic disquisition on trivial details. I think that little story, probably founded on fact but slightly elaborated by fiction, will give you a fairly accurate idea of the extent to which a Collector holding a responsible position is trusted, and also show you the unnecessary delays and difficulties with which he is confronted on that account."

"Suppose for a moment that the policy was entirely reversed, and that when you came out to India, after a due apprenticeship of course, you were given sole charge of a district with the terse order to carry on, and with the understanding that if you were a failure you were fired. Would that position meet with your approval?"

"Whole-heartedly and entirely. I could then settle down and do a real job of work."

"That," explained Bannerji, "is what I actually mean by the formula of 'Trust', on which is based the organisation of the League of Youth. There is no formidable book of words. There are, of course, regulations but they are so few and so simple that every neophyte within a week of his initiation knows them by heart."

"But surely there must be minor difficulties especially in the case of new branches."

"All minor difficulties must be settled by the branches concerned in their own way."

"Are there no reports of progress, monthly quarterly, or even annually?"

"No. Why should there be when once the principle of 'Trust' is conceded? Progress is the natural corollary of hard and conscientious work. Only the cases of those are reported who have been eliminated as unfit for further service and so far the number has been extraordinarily small."

"The organisation and all its details are astounding, but, as I have already asked you this morning, what is the specific aim behind the general idea of the welfare of the country?"

"I am going to speak to you very frankly, Fred. The specific aim behind the general idea of the welfare of the country is the obvious fundamental principle that you will never get anything in this world you are not strong enough to take and that you will never keep anything you are not strong enough to hold. Our politicians are demanding freedom and independence as their right. They shut their eyes before the object lessons of Abyssinia and China. Might is the only right that is recognised in the world at

the present day."

"You believe then in armed revolution with its bloodshed and violence, its chaos and confusion its inevitable waste and destruction?"

"I personally do not believe in bloodshed and violence but I can not ignore the fact that they are the concomitants of the generally accepted principle of might. As a matter of fact it is with a view to lessen the possibilities of sanguinary conflicts in India that I planned out a strenuous course of military training for the League of Youth."

"That sounds slightly paradoxical."

"The paradox is more apparent than real. Italy would never have dreamt of annexing Abyssinia if the latter had been prepared to put up a strenuous defence, and Japan, conscious of her superiority in armament and organisation, boldly launches an attack on China, a country with a ten times superiority in population and twenty times in expanse of territory. I want India to be spared a similar fate. If there happened to be a successful invasion of India in the morning our politicians would immediately table an unanimous and emphatic resolution against the unwarranted and unjustifiable act of aggression perpetrated on a democratic and peace-loving nation. China and Abyssinia

tabled similar resolutions."

"A successful invasion is scarcely within the region of practical politics just at present."

"What looked impossible yesterday becomes probable to-day and will become the obvious to-morrow."

"Oracular and cryptical."

"Only plain common sense. Look at the position of the world at the present time. Every nation on the face of the globe is feverishly arming. The opposing forces have already been divided into clearly defined groups. Germany, Italy and Japan are on the one side. Russia, France, and England are on the other. The Spanish turmoil is an indirect preliminary trial of strength. It is conceivable that saner counsels may eventually prevail and that a world conflict may be avoided, but it is also conceivable and even more probable that there will be a general conflagration. In that case India may easily become the cockpit of the East. Foreign armies on Indian soil whilst four hundred million Indians look on hopelessly and helplessly. They see their country desolated and devastated, their unrivalled treasures stolen or destroyed, and their towns and cities, their canals and their railways, their aerodromes and

their harbours, a series of irreparable ruins. And all this, as in the case of Belgium, through no fault of their own."

"Aren't you taking rather too pessimistic a view of the situation?"

"I do not think so. I am endeavouring to visualise realities and it is always well to be prepared for the worst."

"There is the Indian Army which will gladly defend their hearths and homes."

"What will be the use of half a dozen divisions against massed hordes of foreign aggression?"

"The Indians themselves will surely flock to the standard in defence of their country."

"Untrained men can do very little against metal and machinery. If war does break out, it will break out suddenly and under ordinary circumstances there would be no trained men to meet the crisis. Now you can see the object of the League of Youth. Already we have a quarter of a million trained young men who form a cadre which can very easily and quickly be expanded to a million and even more."

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bannerji took up a large atlas and opened it at a combined map of Asia and Europe. Fred was taken by surprise.

“What is the idea?” enquired Fred.

“Have a little patience and I’ll do my best to make it clear to you. I shall have to go back a few years in order to make the story more explicit but I’ll be as brief as I possibly can.”

“Please don’t be brief on my account. I am not the least bit impatient and I am most eager to learn all the details. All this is not only interesting but most intriguing.”

Bannerji took up a pencil and pointed to France.

“You remember the French Revolution?”

“Naturally.”

“That is the real origin of the present trouble. The French Revolution meant the rise of the proletariat and the temporary abolition of the monarchy. It created a European conflagration. The struggle then started has been waged con-

tinuously for over a century and a quarter. The power of the proletariat gave rise to Socialism, Communism, and Bolshevism, and there is very little difference between the generally accepted idea of monarchy in those days and the modern ideas of Fascists and Dictators. There is this great difference, however, at the present time. In the days before the French Revolution it was the right divine of kings and aristocrats to govern at their own caprice the people whom they regarded as little better than serfs or slaves. The bloody strife which followed was mainly between classes, between the aristocrat, and the peasant and the bourgeois. Nowadays we are heading for a clash between Democracy and Autocracy. The result will be a world-wide conflagration.

“By the end of the Great War Democracy was apparently at the zenith of its power. The Tsar had been murdered and the Kaiser had been sent into exile. Austria, Hungary, Spain, and Portugal were all *de facto* republics. There was scarcely a single crowned head in the whole of Europe. England was essentially democratic and Italy democratic in name. Within recent years, however, a remarkable change has occurred. Democracy, like o’ervaulting ambition, seems to have ‘overleapt

itself and fallen on the other side.' Dictators have sprung up one after another in Rome and Turkey, Germany and Austria, Italy and Spain. The old universal historical cycle is being repeated in all its stages before our very eyes. From Autocracy to Democracy, and back again from Democracy to Autocracy. The end is always the same and inevitable, namely disruption and dissolution. Out of the ashes of dissolution God alone knows what will arise."

Bannerji was lost in his own thoughts for a few moments. From times immemorial Empires had come and gone. For a brief space they had strutted on the stage of time and played their little parts. Babylon, Athens, Macedon, and Rome were memories of the past. The Holy Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, the French Empire and the German Empire were memories, but still only memories, of more recent date. India also for a fleeting moment had taken its place before the foot-lights in the passing show.

"I am afraid," resumed Bannerji, "that I have gone somewhat off the main track. Anyhow the seed of revolution, transplanted from France germinated, fructified, and multiplied on Russian

soil. Look carefully at this map and observe the enormous expanse of territory marked out as belonging to the United States of the Soviet Republic. Between the republics of France and Russia lies Fascist Germany. To the south of Russia lies republican China. To the south of France lie the republics of Spain and Portugal. An alliance between France and Russia was the obvious solution to eradicate once and for all the obnoxious growth of Autocracy. England and America were democratic on principle. Italy was considered as of no practical importance.

“Germany naturally was not going to sit still and allow herself to be eradicated without a struggle. An alliance with Italy was followed almost immediately by an alliance with Japan. The check-mate was forestalled and a counter-offensive immediately launched. Germany tears to tiny shreds what remained of the Versailles Treaty. Italy annexes Abyssinia and proceeds to fortify strategic positions in the Red Sea and in the Mediterranean. Japan boldly attacks China. Almost within twelve months the position was entirely reversed. It is no longer a question of the isolation and eradication of Germany. It is now a question of the immediate adoption of the

boldest measures to prevent the separation and isolation of France and Russia."

"I am afraid," remarked Fred, "that you are inclined to be too brief in your explanation. I haven't quite grasped the point about the separation and isolation of France and Russia."

"Let us take France first of all. Look at her position on the map. She is surrounded by Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain. The idea is that Austria will be absorbed by Germany and that Spain will become Fascist. Thus France becomes completely isolated and the communications with her African possessions precarious in the extreme."

"That is all very fine and large but before that comes to pass there would be very serious complications."

"Granted," replied Bannerji, "but I am outlining for you a general scheme which, I can assure you on reliable authority, is not founded on mere conjecture or hypothesis."

Fred was impressed by the serious manner in which Bannerji spoke. He felt convinced that he was no longer dealing with imaginative speculations but with grim realities.

Bannerji, again pointing to the map, continued:

"The connections between Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain are pretty obvious and present no insuperable difficulties. The connections between Germany and Japan are not so obvious."

"Yes," admitted Fred, "it is rather difficult to see where Germany and Japan will join hands."

"They will join hands in India."

"An obvious impossibility."

"Not so obvious or impossible when you hear further details of the general scheme which has been carefully and thoroughly considered in all its aspects. The Germans are remarkable for their thoroughness with regard to details."

"There is a very big gap between Germany and India and an almost insuperable gap between India and Japan."

"In the Great War direct communication between Germany and India just missed being successfully established."

"You mean the through train from Berlin to Baghdad."

"Yes, and it is more feasible now than it was ever before. From Baghdad there are two direct routes to India. One goes over land to Quetta and Peshawar, and Karachi is very easy of access from the Persian Gulf."

"That is undoubtedly possible. I can easily imagine a strong Fascist link between Berlin and Karachi or Quetta with the pivoting centre at Baghdad. What about the other end of the chain? Surely Hong-Kong and Singapore would prove rather formidable obstacles."

"The Eastern end of the chain, strange to say seems to have been taken almost for granted. Japan overruns South China. French Indo-China is swept up in the onward successful march. The frontiers of Burma are reached by an overland route. Singapore ceases to be formidable, and Madras and Calcutta are exposed to direct attack. Thus Germany and Japan join forces in India, and Russia and France are not only separated but isolated."

"How is England accounted for in this scheme of things?"

"As in the Great War all Germany's lines of communication will be internal. Her fleet of pocket-battleships, cruisers, and submarines will be left free to deal with England."

"What a hope."

"Not so hopeless as it appears at first sight. Germany is no match for the whole might of the British Navy but the whole might of the British

Navy will be considerably lessened owing to the fact that it will have to be split up into four great divisions, namely, the Home Fleet, the Mediterranean Fleet, and Fleet in the Far East, and a strong Fleet for the protection of transport. The mere question of transport will be extraordinarily difficult. The Mediterranean may not be a practical proposition. There will only remain the long voyage around by the Cape."

"What about America?"

"America may take some time to make up her mind about joining in the fray but when she does eventually come in, her strength will be lessened in proportion to the distance she is from the scene of operations."

"The best laid schemes of mice and men
Gang aft aglee."

"I quite agree with you but there is one thing sure and certain."

"What is that?"

"If there is going to be a war, and the probabilities are rather for than against, then India will be well within the vortex of hostilities. That is my sole concern at the present moment. How are we in India going to be best prepared to meet that eventuality?"

"Ought not that to be the sole concern of the Government of India?"

"I am sorry, Fred, for appearing to be conceited enough to dare to poach on the preserves of the Government of India but I would ask you to have a little more patience. What I have said so far is mainly introductory. I have not yet come to the pith of the story."

"I am beginning to realise that a story is a kind of misnomer for what you have just been telling me. More fact than fiction, I should imagine."

"Shall we say," replied Bannerji smiling, "a fairly authoritative statement of the past and present with an intelligent anticipation of the future."

"Right. Carry on. I am all agog to hear about the future."

"I am afraid we have not yet quite finished with the present. You mentioned just now that precautionary measures ought to be the sole concern of the Government of India with regard to the security of the country. I agree with you that it ought to be but unfortunately it is far from being the case. The sole concern of the Government of India is to carry out the orders of Whitehall."

"As far as India is concerned, that comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"Not necessarily and not always. The concern of Whitehall is for the British Empire as a whole and not for any one portion of it in particular. When there is a clash of interests the whole naturally predominates."

"There can be no clash of interests where the security of India is concerned."

"There can, and there is a definite clash at the present moment. The pity of it is that the interests are really identical and the present clash weakens both the part as well as the whole."

"To what in particular do you refer?"

"Internal security. In view of what I have just told you and of the dangerous position of India on the outbreak of hostilities, it is essential that there should be as large a trained military force as possible in the country. What is the position at present? There are far less than a quarter of a million trained troops. This is ridiculous for a country of the size of India whose population runs to four hundred millions. It is absurd and even farcical when you contrast it with the position in other countries. The present armed forces of Japan, Italy, and Germany, roughly approximat-

ed, would amount to ten million and within six months even that prodigious number could easily be doubled."

"Indian Politicians are already crying out against the crushing burden of taxation involved in the expenditure on the present admittedly inadequate force."

"Indian Nationalists have been clamouring for generations for the Indianisation of the Army and within recent years have been forcibly voicing their demands for the compulsory military training of their educated youth."

"The two things appear to me to be inconsistent."

"The inconsistency arises from the fundamental diversity of two completely different angles of vision. You talk about Indian Politicians. I am talking about Indian Nationalists. You fondly imagined that the authorities at Whitehall are Patriots, whereas they are merely Politicians."

"Oh, look here," exclaimed Fred, "that is pretty tall, you know, just hold on for a moment until I get my bearings properly."

Bannerji smiled as he saw Fred placing his head between his hands in deep concentration. Sheila was right when she told Fred that her father loved

him as if he were his own son. He had been a very close friend of Fred's father but he had become even on more intimate terms with Fred himself. Fred to his mind was an ideal type of manhood. Physically fit, mentally balanced, steadfast, sincere, and straight-forward. He knew that Fred was more or less disgruntled and dissatisfied with the present state of affairs in India but he also knew that as long as Fred was in the Service he would at all costs discharge whatever duties were imposed upon him both loyally and conscientiously.

Fred on the other hand was suddenly struck by the discrimination between Nationalists and Politicians. He knew many Indian Nationalists and they were men of integrity. Their lives were an example of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation in the interests of their country. He was also acquainted with many Politicians at home and he had to confess to himself that their main characteristics were self-interest and self-aggrandisement. Naturally the angles of vision of Nationalists and Politicians might not always coincide and sometimes they might be as poles apart.

"I think," he remarked after a little while, "I am beginning to see the drift of your meaning,

but the point is not yet quite clear in my mind."

"The question of the Internal Security of India is rather a good case in point. Indian Nationalists naturally grumble at the huge expenditure which they are called upon to pay for the upkeep of a foreign army of occupation. They would willingly pay twice as much for the upkeep of a purely National Army. Nervous Politicians at home look askance at the idea of a National army for two reasons. First of all India provides an ideal free training ground for British troops and secondly, the lesson, even with bitter previous experience, has not yet been learnt that no country at the present day, whether small or large, can be held indefinitely by fear and physical force. What is the result of the present state of affairs? In case of an invasion only one part of the Army in India would be available for resistance. The other portion would be required to police the country. That is the outcome of the present policy of mistrust and shows pretty clearly, I think, the clash of interests."

"I am afraid," admitted Fred, "that argument sounds very forcible."

"It would sound even more forcible," rejoin-

ed Bannerji, "if you were to consider the consequences which would have followed from a policy of trust. A contented India, as a friendly ally, would be a tower of strength, whereas a discontented India is a menace and a danger."

"There are Politicians in India as well as Nationalists," suggested Fred.

"I grant you that willingly and I am prepared to go even further by stating that there are Patriots in England as well as Politicians. Major Cathcart is a shining and glorious example."

"Here comes the pith of the story. I expect."

"You are quite right. It is people like your father and Major Cathcart and Mabel Davenant which bid me to hope that even yet misunderstanding may be removed and a saner policy pursued. You know already the relations that existed between your father and myself, and also the very high esteem with which I regarded Mabel. It was in connection with Mabel that I first got an insight into the sterling character of Major Cathcart. They were married from my house and naturally I saw a good deal of him before the marriage. The more I knew him the better I liked him and moreover I felt that the liking was reciprocated. It was only in London, however, when I became High Commis-

sioner, that our mutual liking developed into a real intimate friendship."

"You saw him frequently, I suppose, on account of Mabel and Sheila."

"I also saw him frequently on account of a secret and confidential affair in which, I am glad to say I was able to give him some assistance. The secret and confidential affair was the internal security of India. Do you know anything about the history of Major Cathcart?"

"Only what Sheila told me about him."

"What exactly did she tell you? I am anxious to know. Very often a little knowledge gives a false perspective and I should hate to think that one of my heroes was not properly appreciated by my youngest and dearest friend."

They were sitting side by side at the desk with the map in front of them. Bannerji, in order to emphasize the truth of his last remark, placed his hand lightly on Fred's shoulder. Fred was again impressed by the gravity in which the remark was made but perhaps even more so by the open avowal of affection and the frank and friendly gesture.

"As far as I remember," he said after a short pause, "Sheila gave me skeleton outlines into which any details might be filled. A soldier who

didn't look like a soldier but a man who was very charming and amusing and extensively travelled. He was very wealthy and prematurely retired from the Army on his marriage."

"Those indeed are skeleton outlines as you will easily understand from his real history. Major Cathcart was a brilliant soldier. He passed first on the list into the Staff College and also passed out first. After passing out he did not know which dissatisfied him the more, the routine duties of a Regimental Officer or the more tedious work on the Staff. Though to all outward appearances he was calm and unassuming, he was filled with an all-consuming restless energy. Every spot of leave he was able to secure was spent on travel and treks. At first those journeys were undertaken merely for the sake of working off some of his feverish energy, but gradually they took on a definite shape. Perhaps there is no man living at present who knows more about Russia, China, and Japan than Major Cathcart.

"He collected the most exhaustive and detailed information about those three countries. Their internal and external policies, their finances, and their armaments were all carefully noted down and passed on to the Intelligence Depart-

ment of the War Office. Eventually it was suggested to him that he should resign his commission in the Army and come on to the unattached list of the Secret Service. To this he assented without the slightest hesitation. It was a great sacrifice. He gave up an honourable public career in which he would undoubtedly have risen to the very highest rank and became an unknown and insignificant cipher. Besides the Chief of the Intelligence Department, there were only two other people who were aware of what he had done, namely his wife and myself.

“The Chief was another excellent specimen of a true English patriot. Major Cathcart introduced me to him and the three of us had long and frequent conversations. The subject-matter of our discourse was always the same, namely the Internal Security of India. It was in this connection that I was able to be of some assistance to Major Cathcart. According to the information in possession of the Chief the arrangements made for the Internal Security of India left nothing to be desired both with regard to the armed forces and the loyalty of the population. I quickly disillusioned him about the loyalty of the population. I was able to show him copies of

resolutions passed unanimously and with acclamation at mass meetings of the people, and copies of resolutions tabled for the various Councils and Assemblies, all unequivocally stating that India would not take hand, or part in the next war. Major Cathcart was able to disillusion him about the adequacy of the armed forces.

"The Chief was eventually convinced himself but that did not bring us very far forward. His duty was simply to place the information at his disposal before the military and political authorities. The military authorities were duly impressed about the inadequacy of the arrangements made for the Internal Security of India and hastened to impress their views on the political authorities. The political authorities, otherwise the politicians, simply guffawed. They told the military authorities to mind their own business and get on with their own particular job. They told the Chief to use more discrimination in the selection of reliable information. They wanted facts, not fiction. They further remarked scathingly that the originators of those imaginative suggestions should first of all be dismissed from the Service, if indeed they had ever unfortunately been employed, and then medically examined as suitable

subjects for a lunatic asylum.

"The Chief was very glum and discontented when we all three met later to discuss the results of the conferences. I think the reference to facts and fiction must have rattled him considerably."

"‘Good God,’ he exclaimed, ‘those damned politicians are enough to drive one mad. Everything is put down as fiction that does not fit in with their idiotic preconceived theories. For the past twenty years they have been uniformly successful in making an unholy mess of things in general. They started off with the most egregious political blunder of all times, namely the Treaty of Versailles. An unnecessary welter of confusion was stirred up in Ireland with the result that the Irish Free State became the republican Eire. Egypt is lost to the British Empire. The vacillating policy adopted over the question of Abyssinia made our politicians the laughing-stock of the whole world, and England suddenly degenerated into the ranks of a third-rate power. They concealed from the British Public, of whose interest they were supposed to be the sole custodians, the alarming increase in the rate of rearmament in other countries in order to ensure a victory at the polls in the ensuing General Election. Their

crowning imbecility and the most exasperating of all is the fact that they pat themselves on the back, and confer Knighthoods and Earldoms on each other for services to the State duly rendered.' ”

“We were all on common ground in the denunciation of politicians as such but something more was imperatively required. Action had to be taken immediately. There and then a Triple Alliance was formed. Major Cathcart and I promised to do all in our power to remedy the present state of affairs. The Chief solemnly assured us that he would place all his resources at our disposal, but at the same time clearly and emphatically stated:—

“ ‘You must remember that we three are playing lone hands. None of us is officially cognisant of the others, and the State, I mean the damned politicians, is blissfully ignorant of us all.’ ”

Sheila had entered the room noiselessly. She had changed from her dapper uniform into her graceful Indian costume which she habitually wore in the house. Approaching the desk where she found Fred and her father apparently poring over a map in deep meditation, she stood between them and affectionately placed her hands on their shoulders.

"The news on the radio is rather sensational this evening," she quietly remarked.

"What is it?" asked her father.

"More trouble with Japan."

CHAPTER NINE

Bannerji and Fred looked at each other and smiled.

Fred made an attempt to get up in order to fetch another chair, but Sheila gently pressed his shoulder as she remarked:—

“Please don’t get up, Fred. I am quite comfortable this way. I wish to have a look at the map and then I want to hear all about the joke.”

“I am afraid it is much too serious for a joke,” said her father.

“Then why did the two of you smile at the mention of Japan?”

“Things too bitter even for tears sometimes find expression in a smile.”

“Is Japan one of these things?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“On account of inexcusable folly and inaptitude.”

Fred had an opportunity of quietly observing Sheila whilst she talked with her father. He had

seen her in three different impersonations that day. In the morning she was fresh, sparkling, and eager as he had seen her often at Garnacanty at the beginning of a day's outing. During the day she was the serious and efficient Commandant. Now as she stood there with her hand lightly resting on his shoulder he received an impression that he had never before experienced. Perhaps it was because of the marked contrast between her appearance in a dapper uniform and in the graceful clinging folds of a sari. It might have been because of the complete change of expression in her countenance. The neatly coiled hair under the smart forage cap made her look rather austere, but the long flowing tresses, faintly glimpsed through the thin silk sari, gave her a soft, warm, and effeminate look. Her eyes were now more blue than grey. Through the rough tweed material of his coat he seemed to sense a caress in the light touch of her hand on his shoulder. He sat perfectly tense and still as he listened to the conversation between father and daughter.

"Look at this map," continued Bannerji pointing out China, and Indo-China, "Japan has an overland route to Burma, one of the frontiers of India.

Now look at the other end of the Fascist chain. From Germany here is a direct route to Baghdad, where it bifurcates to Karachi and Peshawar. The inference is obvious, isn't it?"

"India becomes the cockpit of the East."

"Thank God, Sheila, we are not altogether unprepared."

"I take it that Fred has been initiated."

"Yes," interposed Fred, "and it is going to be another case of a Triple Alliance."

Sheila smiled down at him with flashing eyes and Bannerji suddenly recalled another scene in far-off Garnacanty, when he thought how easy it would be to find a solution for the Indian problem if it were left in the sole charge of Sheila and Fred. "Perhaps," he said to himself, "those two may yet play a very important part in the future destiny of my country."

It was a tense moment. In order to ease matters a bit Fred casually continued:—

"As Jim, the Stationmaster would say, 'I'm maning to be after going all out on this little lot. It don't look like a dead cert, but sure a dead cert never came home, and even if it did what the divil good would it be for man or beast?'"

Sheila and her father laughed heartily.

"Garnacanty seems very far away just now," remarked Bannerji.

"I am afraid it does, and all this makes my spot of leave look rather precarious."

Bannerji hesitated for a moment before replying:—

"It is very difficult to say. Anything may happen. On the whole I think that your leave is not likely to suffer. Negotiations are likely to last the best part of a year."

Fred looked at his watch.

"Half-seven," he exclaimed. "I must be getting a move on."

"What time are you dining with the Commissioner?" asked Bannerji.

"Eight-fifteen."

"Sure you have plenty of time," remarked Sheila, with a very good imitation of the Irish brogue, "but if you don't hurry on, you'll be late."

All three were transported for the moment to the quiet, peace, and loveliness of Garnacanty. The over-land route to India and the through train from Berlin to Baghdad were completely forgotten.

Their thoughts lingered lovingly on the hap-

piness of the past, and strayed with a kind of forlorn hope to the uncertainties of the future.

"Come along, Fred, since you must go, and I'll see you off the premises. Dad, you must not come out into the cold raw air. You are too precious to be allowed to run any risks."

They stood on the steps of the verandah for a few moments talking trivialities. They seemed loth to part. At last Fred held out his hand saying:—

"Bye-bye, Sheila. You mustn't stay out in the cold either. You are precious too, you know."

The words thrilled Sheila as well as the way he clasped her hands in both of his. She not only returned the pressure but placed her left hand over his right. There they stood for a few moments with hands clasped firmly together, looking into each other's eyes and discovering something there which they had never seen before.

"Bye-bye, Fred," she replied, with a little catch in her breath.

Fred jumped into his car and drove rapidly away.

Sheila remained standing on the steps of the verandah with her arms folded on her breast,

staring quietly into the still night. She did not feel the cold. Her blood raced throbbing through her veins and she felt her face hot and flushed. To return into the house immediately was impossible.

It was a beautiful night. The pale yellow orb of the moon seemed to hang by invisible threads from a silver-spangled light-blue canopy. At first she watched the car until it became amalgamated with the shimmering objects in the distance, and even then her gaze remained fixed on the spot where it had finally disappeared.

"What is this that has so suddenly happened to me?" she said to herself. "I was delighted, of course, to meet Fred this morning but this is something more than delight."

Methodically she reviewed in her mind the incidents of the day. The first thing out of the ordinary that happened was when she pinned on the lapel of Fred's coat the badge of the League of Youth. She had meant to do it in silence but something at the last moment compelled her to whisper to him her happiness. His answer thrilled her. The next thing that happened out of the ordinary was when she entered her father's study in the evening. The placing of her hand on Fred's shoulder gave

her the same thrill as she experienced in the morning on parade. That thrill was intensified a thousand times when before parting they stood close together with hands clasped looking into each other's eyes. Then the truth dawned on her. She was in love with Fred.

"I love him, I love him, I love him," she repeated to herself half aloud, and oblivious of her surroundings, revelled in the ecstasy of the moment.

An audible click of the heels, and a smart salute started her out of her pleasant reverie effectively and instantaneously.

Umrao Singh suddenly appeared before her apparently from nowhere.

Things had gone badly with Umrao Singh throughout the whole of that day. The first appearance of Fred on parade made him uneasy and perturbed. He had been a long time in the Army and had been a faithful, loyal and efficient officer. His sudden recall home on the death of his elder brother and his father's bitter resentment against the Government, had completely changed his outlook. He had not only inherited his father's property but also unhesitatingly followed his last instructions. For the future his loyalty

was to be for his country and not for a foreign government which in his opinion had definitely broken its solemn pledges. Consequently to him every I.C.S. official was anathema. He no longer trusted them. He suspected that there was a deep-laid scheme behind all their actions with the definite object of making fast and irrevocably binding the fetters of foreign domination.

"Here," he said to himself, "is the Collector. What is his object in coming to our Headquarters? Either to get control of the organisation, if there is no apparent danger, so as to be on the safe side, or to smash it in its infancy if he discovers anywhere the slightest suspicious element."

Sheila's speech allayed to a certain extent his uneasiness and perturbation. Then the whispered colloquy as Sheila pinned on the badge of the League of Youth made it plain to him even though they had not yet discovered it for themselves, that they were in love. He raged internally. It was only by an almost superhuman effort of self-control that he succeeded in preserving an apparently calm exterior. His anger was so furious when he saw them going off on the aeroplane together that he dared not trust himself to

be present at the aerodrome on their return. He shut himself in his quarters in order to be able to think quietly over the whole situation.

For a long time he could not control his thoughts. The scene on the parade kept constantly recurring before his vision. He strode up and down the room blazing with fury, and filled with homicidal thoughts. He hated the Government. He hated the Collectors as representatives of the Government, and he hated Fred with an additional hatred because he had dared to fall in love with Sheila. Then a thought suddenly flashed across his mind which made him absolutely see red.

"My God," he cried aloud. "Suppose that he is not really in love with Sheila. Suppose he is only playing with her affection with some deep ulterior motive."

He stopped short in his frenzied walk up and down the room. He clenched his hands until the nails bit into the flesh of the palms, and he ground his teeth in an insensate fury.

"That surely is the game," he almost shouted. "What easier method could be adopted for the smashing of the League of Youth? What did the life and happiness of a mere Indian girl matter under such circumstances? Even if he does love

her, marriage between them is unthinkable and impossible."

He went over to his desk and sat down. He buried his head in his hands and endeavoured to think out what was best to be done. Two things stood out clearly from the welter of his confused thoughts. Sheila's happiness was at stake. The League of Youth was in danger.

He himself was in love with Sheila but there was nothing sensual about his love. He worshipped the very ground she walked on, and was prepared to go through fire and water for her sake. He was happy in seeing her daily, in being in close touch with her, and in carrying out her behests. For him, with his noble ideals of Rajput chivalry, transmitted through a long line of aristocratic ancestors, Sheila was a heroine through whom the freedom and independence of his country might be achieved. The means of achievement was the League of Youth. If he could manage to save Sheila from the wiles and snares of the Collector, he would at the same time secure the safety of the League of Youth.

How was he to compass this? There were only two ways, persuasion or force. Treachery he abhorred. With Sheila force was just as much

out of the question as persuasion was with the Collector. This narrowed the issue considerably. If he failed to convince Sheila, he determined to remove the Collector by force.

Once he had come to a definite decision he very soon regained his usual self-control. He now concentrated his attention in finding out the best method of approaching Sheila. This was no easy task. The Commandant was at all times easy of access with regard to matters relating to the League of Youth, but in this particular matter there was a definite personal element which he dared not touch. The question of love could not be broached. Here was a distinct handicap. He felt convinced that the Collector was seeking to win her affections for purely political motives, but it would be the height of presumption on his part to attempt to discuss her personal feelings or her social relations. After long hours of worrying meditation he determined to go to Sheila and put her on her guard against the Collector. It was then seven-thirty.

As he approached the bungalow he saw Sheila and Fred standing on the verandah. They were so engrossed in each other that they neither saw nor heard him. He slipped quietly into the

shadow and watched them intently. They were turned sideways towards him, and he could almost see the expression on their faces in the bright moonlight. He couldn't fail to notice their fervent hand-clasp. Their heads were close together, and at any moment he expected to see them kiss. At last Fred departed, and having waited for what he considered to be a suitable interval he presented himself before Sheila.

"Yes, Umrao Singh, what is the matter?"

"I wished to speak to you about the League of Youth."

"Won't you come in and sit down?"

"No, thank you, Commandant. I shall only take a few minutes."

"Isn't everything all right?"

"Yes, everything is all right so far, but something happened to-day which may easily make things go wrong."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the appointment of the Collector as patron."

Sheila stiffened imperceptibly. Up to this time she had been frankly friendly with Umrao Singh but unconsciously a different note came into her voice, the note of the Commandant. Umrao

Singh immediately noticed the change and drew his own conclusions.

"I am afraid I do not understand you. Will you please explain what you mean?"

"The Collector is a Government official."

"Yes."

"His first duty will always be to serve the Government."

"Naturally."

"The interests of the Government do not always coincide with the interests of its inhabitants. I am talking from experience."

"Well?"

"The sole object of the Collector in becoming patron of the organisation is to have it in his power to smash it if ever the necessity should arise."

"What is your suggestion?"

"I have no suggestion to offer. I have only come to warn you, to put you on your guard."

Sheila was swayed by various emotions. At first she was inclined to be rather annoyed. This was the first occasion on which her authority had been called in question. She was under the impression that Umrao Singh was about to offer his suggestions and advice. When she found,

however, that he came along simply for the purpose of explaining his fears, her tone again became friendly.

"You are loyal to me and The League of Youth, Umrao Singh?"

"Unto death. For me you are The League of Youth."

"You trust me?"

"With my life."

"My past and present considerations have always been solely for The League of Youth. I have devoted my life to its service. In addition I can assure you that The League of Youth will never be harmed in any way by the Collector. Are you satisfied?"

"Completely, Commandant."

"Good-night, Umrao Singh."

Sheila held out her hands and Umrao Singh lifted it reverently to his bent forehead.

Umrao Singh went away completely satisfied as far as Sheila was concerned. Her personal magnetism, even without her solemn word of assurance, had removed all his fears. His mistrust, however, of the Collector had not disappeared, and he determined to keep his movements under the strictest observations.

The interview had quite a different effect on Sheila.

"Umrao Singh is right," she said to herself. "The League of Youth is in danger from the Collector, but not in the way he imagines. He has indeed given me a timely warning. This thing must proceed no further. I must cut him completely out of my thoughts."

The gods in high Olympus lifted their crystal goblets of foaming yellow ambrosia to their red sensuous lips. They winked and smiled as they took long deep luscious draughts.

About the same time Fred had come to an almost similar conclusion. As he drove back to the bungalow in his car he felt elated and happy. He tried to think what had brought about the sudden change in his relations with Sheila. He knew now that he loved her.

"I've got it," he said, "It must have been the discovery that Umrao Singh was also in love with her which first opened my eyes to the true state of affairs, and the touch of her hand on my shoulder as she was looking over the map in the study finally convinced me."

He took like Sheila gave himself over to the enjoyment of the present moment, but as also

in the case of Sheila there came a sudden reaction. This happened when he was driving along to the Commissioner's house. The natural sequence to love was marriage, but would Sheila ever consent to marry him? First of all there was the question of race and religion, but by far the most formidable obstacle was Sheila's whole-hearted devotion to the service of her country and to The League of Youth. Somehow he was convinced that she would never consent.

"This must not proceed any further," he thought. "I must cut her completely out of my thoughts."

The gods punched each other in their fat paunches and burst out into an Olympian roar of thunderous laughter.

Fred sat down to dinner with the Commissioner in a very chastened mood. They were dining alone.

The Commissioner was on the eve of retirement. He had been in the service for over thirty years and during the whole of that period he had worked hard and conscientiously. Very early on in his career he had been shrewd enough to see that his simple duty was to carry out the orders of the Government literally. Original thinking,

suggestions, or innovations were not only not very acceptable but even definitely discouraged. For a good many years he thought this was an admirable plan and saved everyone a lot of bother and trouble. The Great War and the rapid advance of Congress to power had completely altered existing conditions, and the old mechanical routine of the Government machinery was no longer competent to deal with the new problems which were constantly arising. He found himself caught in a transition stage, the worst of all stages, where at one moment he was blamed for not showing a certain amount of initiative, and at the next moment, especially if things went wrong, severely censured for acting without definite and explicit instructions. Conflicting and contradictory orders were being constantly issued to cope with new and strange situations. What was sedition yesterday was patriotism to-day, and the Radical of former times was now looked upon as the staunch and firm ally of the Government. No wonder he felt confused and dispirited. He had, through no fault of his own, got into a groove from which extrication at his age was wellnigh impossible.

There was very little in common between

Fred and the Commissioner except that they were both members of the same service. In consequence they both naturally talked shop at dinner. The Council elections, now close at hand, and the necessary preparations engrossed the earlier part of the conversation. To the Commissioner both the preparations and the elections were of paramount importance. On the other hand Fred, in the light of his recent conversation with Bannerji, regarded the whole affair as an insignificant detail, if not an actual waste of valuable time. He was rather inclined to be bored than otherwise, and only half of his attention was given to the rambling and discursive statements of the Commissioner. His replies to the innumerable questions were short, succinct, and relevant. The majority of the questions might really have been left unanswered as they were merely rhetorical, but Fred, with his innate courtesy and politeness, did his best to prevent the conversation from becoming a monologue. The Commissioner would not have minded in the least. He had long since laid the flattering unction to his soul that theoretical discussion, even when one-sided, was real hard solid work. After all the spoken word was much more difficult than the written, especially with a steno-

grapher at his elbow.

Fred's attention was suddenly rivetted by a direct question from his host.

"What do you think of the Rai Bahadur?"

"Nothing. He is a twister, and a liar, and the truth isn't in him."

"That is pretty strong."

"You can make it twice as strong and even then it will probably be an understatement of the true facts of the case."

"He has a long record of service to Government."

"Rather a long record of service to himself. He wouldn't think twice about letting the Government down if it suited his purpose."

"He hasn't let the Government down so far, and that is so much to his credit."

"I should be rather inclined to say not so much to his credit as to the fact that up to this time his interests coincided with those of the Government."

"Well, of course, that is a matter of opinion, I like to give people the benefit of the doubt. He came to see me this morning and I had long talk with him."

"I have never yet heard of anyone having had a short talk with the Rai Bahadur."

"Perhaps he is a little verbose and I must admit it that he does take a long time in getting to his point. He told me that he had recently been very graciously received by the Governor who gave him an assurance of his sympathetic support in the forthcoming elections."

"I told him that both he and his opponent had my complete sympathy."

"I am afraid I do not quite follow what you mean."

"I pointed out to him that on pure humanitarian grounds all people in difficult situation had my sympathy, and that I considered politics one of the most difficult situations of all."

"That was rather cold comfort for him, wasn't it?"

"It wasn't meant to be anything else."

"Then he asked for my sympathetic support. I carefully explained to him the exact position of affairs, and showed him how my hands were tied."

"I showed him the circular from Government."

"Oh," exclaimed the Commissioner, "that puts an entirely different complexion on things. So he knew all about it already."

"Of course he did."

"In fact, to put it mildly, he was rather dis-

ingenuous on this particular occasion."

"That is putting it very mildly indeed. The plain fact of the matter is that he deliberately set out to deceive you. You will never get any change out of the Rai Bahadur. That sounds slangy and perhaps a bit undignified, but the Rai Bahadur couldn't run straight even if he tried."

The Commissioner sat silent for a while. He didn't see eye to eye with Fred on very many points but there was one outstanding fact which he honestly recognised. There were six districts under his charge. In all the other districts, except Fred's district, there had within recent years been serious trouble at one time or another. He frankly admitted to himself that Fred was his most capable and efficient District Officer. Consequently it was with an immense sigh of relief that he was able to leave the affairs of the Rai Bahadur in the hands of his trustworthy Collector.

"By the way there was one point which I promised the Rai Bahadur to investigate.

"What is it?" asked Fred.

"Do you happen to know anything about the League of Youth?"

"I happen to know everything about The

League of Youth. I am a patron of the Headquarters' branch."

"This is most extraordinary. I am beginning to be quite convinced that your estimate of the Rai Bahadur's character is perfectly correct."

"Why?"

"He has definitely told me that the organisation of The League of Youth was not only seditious but positively immoral. Since you have consented to become a patron, that statement must be utterly devoid of all truth."

"I should very much like to ask a favour from you, sir."

"Yes, of course, I shall be only too pleased to help you in any way I can."

"Can you get that statement about the League of Youth in writing from the Rai Bahadur?"

"I certainly can, and I shall insist on getting his statement in writing. I am determined to stand no further nonsense from him."

"Thank you very much, sir. When you get the statement, will you kindly hand it over to me?"

"With very great pleasure, and what is more, I'll gladly give you a free hand to deal with the matter in any way you deem fit."

“I am very grateful to you, sir, and I can assure you that the Rai Bahadur will not give you any further trouble for a very long time.”

CHAPTER TEN

About a week later the Rai Bahadur received a very curt letter from the Collector requesting him to come to his bungalow at eight o'clock punctually on the following morning.

The Rai Bahadur gleefully rubbed his hands.

"Ah," he said, "my interview with the Commissioner has had the desired effect. I felt certain that something would happen when he asked me for a written statement about The League of Youth."

He was very quickly disillusioned.

As soon as he entered the Collector's study he was taken completely by surprise in more ways than one. The Collector was seated at his desk, and on either side of him sat Sheila Bannerji and Captain Umrao Singh. They were both in uniform.

The Rai Bahadur was not proffered a seat, and he had to remain standing like a criminal in the dock. The Collector looked stern and his voice was curt and magisterial.

"You are Rai Bahadur Kedar Nath?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know that I am the Collector and District Magistrate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Seated on my right is Miss Bannerji, commandant of The League of Youth and on my left is Captain Umrao Singh, General Captain of The League of Youth."

"Yes, sir."

"This is the statement in original sent by you to the Commissioner?"

The Collector showed him the statement.

"Yes, sir."

"And this is your signature?"

"Yes, sir, but may I say a few words in explanation?"

"No, I intend to do all the explaining that is necessary this morning. Later on, if you should so desire, you will be given all the opportunities you require for submitting explanations written and otherwise."

The Rai Bahadur was very perturbed but he did not yet realise the seriousness of the situation in which he was going to be placed.

"In this statement," continued the Collector,

"you make two serious allegations. You charge the organisation of The League of Youth with sedition and immorality. Are you aware that I am a patron of the organisation?"

"No, sir."

"That shows how much you really know about it. Do you think for a moment that I would ever consent to become the patron of a seditious and immoral organisation?"

"No, sir."

"Or perhaps you think that I am one of those scatter-brained idiots who will accept at haphazard a responsible position in an organisation without first making enquiries with regard to its standing and character."

"No, no sir. Not at all, sir. I did not understand. I humbly apologise. I wish to withdraw the statement."

"That I cannot allow at this stage. The Commissioner has asked me to deal with this matter, and as the matter is very serious I am determined to take a very strong line of action."

"If you would allow me to say a few words, I am sure I could explain everything."

"I am sure you are quite capable of explaining anything to your own satisfaction, but I am also

sure that you would find it extremely difficult to satisfy me. As I have told you already you will in due course be accorded all the opportunities for your explanations, but those explanations will be public explanation in a Court of Law."

The Rai Bahadur was by this time thoroughly frightened, but even worse was still to come.

"I have discussed the whole affair with the Commandant and the General Captain. We are all unanimously agreed that your allegations are malicious and libellous and unsubstantiated by facts. The Commandant and the General Captain have agreed to leave the matter solely in my hands. I have not yet decided, as patron of the organisation, whether to sue you in a Civil or Criminal Court. The Criminal Court would in all probability award you a long term of imprisonment. The Civil would undoubtedly award me very substantial damages. You certainly deserve both awards. Perhaps the best solution would be to sue you on one count in the Civil Court, and on the other in the Criminal Court."

"I need hardly point to you that the consequences of such actions in the Courts would be very serious indeed. Substantial damages in the Civil Court might not affect you very much finan-

cially but your reputation, such as it is and that there is of it, would not be greatly enhanced. A conviction in a Criminal Court, however, would debar you for ever from holding any kind of administrative post under any Government. Your public career would be finally and irrevocably finished. I can't help thinking that in the latter event you, and not the country, would be the loser."

"My reasons for thinking so ought to be fairly obvious. Any man who can bring himself to issue malicious and libellous statements, especially when they are not substantiated by facts, for the sole purpose of furthering his own peculiar selfish and private interests, is not a fit and proper person to be entrusted with any kind of reliable or responsible post in the administration of his country."

The Collector paused and looked at his watch. The Rai Bahadur made an attempt to speak, but he was peremptorily ordered to be silent.

"It is now eight-thirty. If I do not receive by twelve noon to-day an unqualified withdrawal and denial of the base allegations you have made against the League of Youth, I shall sue you

for malicious libel both in the Civil and Criminal Courts."

"I shall give you any assurance you like here and now, and in addition I tender to you and to the League of Youth sincere and heart-felt apologies."

"I do not want any apology. Apologies from people like you who want only defame an organisation which is working whole-heartedly for the good of the country are merely added insults. Nor am I going to be satisfied with verbal assurances. I shall require a written statement duly signed in the presence of authentic witnesses."

"I am prepared to sign any statement that you may dictate."

Fred took up the paper on which the original allegations were made and wrote rapidly on the back:—

"I, Rai Bahadur Kedar Nath, do hereby withdraw the statements made by me over-leaf, and do hereby affirm that they are false both in substance and in fact."

The Rai Bahadur signed it without a moment's hesitation, and his signature was witnessed by Sheila and Umrao Singh.

"You have my permission to go," said the Collector.

The Rai Bahadur faded away.

During the conduct of the proceedings Fred's gaze was centred steadily on the Rai Bahadur whose eyes, except for an occasional fleeting lurking glance, were never lifted from the floor. Umrao Singh gazed as steadily at the Collector as the latter did at the Rai Bahadur. Sheila studied all three, and carefully watched their countenances for every change of expression. The Rai Bahadur's expression changed from a smiling obsequiousness at first to a look of uneasiness and later on to a look of fear and almost panic. Fred's expression never changed but occasionally his eyes flashed with utter contempt and disdain. The changes in Umrao Singh were gradual but at the same time distinctly noticeable. At first he looked alert but aggressive and hostile. The aggressive hostility was slowly replaced by an eager interest, and in the end by respect and admiration.

Umrao Singh was not altogether surprised when the Commandant told him that they were both required to be present at the Collector's bungalow on an official matter in connection with the League of Youth. The only thing that did surprise him was the quickness with which

the Collector moved in the affair. He had no doubt in his mind as to the reason why they were both summoned together. The organisation was going to be officially controlled and then, if necessary, smashed.

They were summoned for a quarter to eight. Before the Rai Bahadur made his appearance the Collector took the opportunity of putting them *au courant* with the facts of the case. He asked them no questions. He did not give the slightest intimation as to the attitude he was going to adopt. Umrao Singh knew that the allegations were absolutely false, malicious, and libellous. He waited with impatience for the proceedings to commence.

The Collector's reception of the Rai Bahadur gave him an entirely unexpected shock. He knew that the Rai Bahadur had obtained his title for his loyal services to the Government, and he naturally thought that he would be received with a certain amount of favour. From the very outset he was treated with scant courtesy. As the proceedings went on, Umrao Singh grew more and more surprised. He was transported back again to the Orderly Room of his Regiment. The Collector forcibly reminded him of his former Com-

manding Officer. Stern, strict, and to the point. No long-winded dissertations. No useless waste of words. Here surely was a man to be trusted. When at last the Rai Bahadur was metaphorically kicked out of the room, the old personal loyalty of Captain Umrao Singh to his Commanding Officer was resuscitated and unhesitatingly transferred to the Collector.

Just for a moment, but only for a moment, he had a twinge of conscience when he remembered his father's last instructions, but that was soon brushed aside.

"After all," he said to himself, "I am not going to serve the Collector or the Government. I am simply giving my allegiance to the patron of The League of Youth."

As soon as the Rai Bahadur had faded away Sheila and Fred looked at each other and smiled. Umrao Singh saw the smile but it no longer caused him the slightest uneasiness. He had now provided himself with a hero in addition to a heroine.

"That's that," remarked Sheila, "and very neatly done too."

"He is a nasty bit of work," replied Fred. "I think he will give The League of Youth a wide berth in future. Now what about a spot of

breakfast? You'll stay on too, Umrao Singh, won't you?"

"Yes, sir. Thank you very much."

Sheila well knew Umrao Singh's attitude towards Government and Government officials and towards Fred in particular. She also knew that if he accepted the invitation to breakfast, he had discarded all his uneasiness and suspicion. Consequently she was very much relieved when Umrao Singh elected to remain. She was also relieved for another reason. She did not want to be alone with Fred yet for a while. They had met that morning on the usual old friendly terms. This was comparatively easy on account of the presence of Umrao Singh, and also on account of the importance of the matter on which they were both summoned. During the proceedings, however, she had seen Fred in action. At the end it was only by the greatest effort of a self-control that she succeeded in passing a casual remark in a nonchalant tone.

"Come along then," said Fred breezily. "It will do us all good to get into a different atmosphere."

Fred likewise was glad that Umrao Singh had consented to remain for breakfast. He longed,

yet feared, to be alone with Sheila.

During breakfast the conversation was mainly between the two men. Fred drew out Umrao Singh about his life in the Army. They found that they had many friends in common and that created a kind of bond between them. Fred was agreeably surprised at the change in the attitude of Umrao Singh towards himself. He remembered how definitely antagonistic he was at their first meeting on the parade ground. Even this morning in his study before the appearance of the Rai Bahadur he was stiff and unbending. Now on the other hand there was no possibility of mistaking the friendliness of his disposition.

"The Rai Bahadur must have done the trick," thought Fred. "Out of evil comes good, and all is well that ends well."

The talk naturally switched on from the Army to the military training imparted to the members of The League of Youth.

"By the way," enquired Fred, "how do the members of the League of Youth compare with the recruits in the Army?"

"More than favourably. You see they are all educated and they pick up in one month more than an illiterate recruit will in six."

"I can quite understand that, but what about the physique?"

"We have adopted the same height and chest measurements as for the Regular Army."

"And the age limit?"

"The minimum age limit is twenty. This is two years higher than the age at which cadets are admitted to Sandhurst."

"You remember the time when you left Sandhurst?"

"Yes, quite well."

"Would a member of The League of Youth after one year's training know as much as you did after three terms at Sandhurst?"

"I should think so, and in addition he would be much more keen and enthusiastic."

"Why? You were keen on your profession, weren't you?"

"I was. Very keen indeed, but I was keen on my profession as such. The members of The League of Youth are enthusiastic workers for the welfare of their country."

"That does make a difference, I admit. Unselfish patriotism is a very keen spur, and will achieve almost the impossible. How do you think they would behave under fire?"

"Excellent. We in the East are fatalists, and death has no terror for us at any time, but more especially in a noble cause."

"You must have been too young for the Great War."

"Yes."

"Have you seen any active service?"

"The Afghanistan War of 1919."

"And that is all he'll probably tell you about it," interposed Sheila. "He was wounded and awarded the Military Cross for distinguished gallantry under the most trying conditions."

"I should very much like to hear all about that," remarked Fred.

"I simply carried out orders," said Umrao Singh quietly.

"Yes," rejoined Sheila, but the orders were carried out with skill and ability."

"What were the orders, Umrao Singh?" queried Fred.

"The company was acting as advanced guard to the battalion which was marching through pretty close country. The enemy opened fire on our left flank, and I was detailed with my platoon to clear the hillock which they occupied. We cleared the hillock. That's all."

"He forgot to mention," added Sheila, "that the hillock was occupied by over a score of the enemy safely ensconced behind mighty boulders, that the last fifty yards of approach was devoid of the least vestige of cover, and that the position was captured at the point of the bayonet."

"Good show that, Umrao Singh. You certainly deserved your Military Cross."

As Fred saw them off, Sheila asked:

"Are you coming along to see us again soon?"

"I am afraid not. I shall be very busy for the next few days, and after that I shall have to go out and tour the district."

"Come along as soon as you can, and thank you very much for this morning's job of work."

Incident

Three musketeers:
1. Ibrahim
2. Hossain
3. Ali Mohammad

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Fred went out to tour his district. Touring the district could easily be one series of glorious picnics for officers who did not take their work too conscientiously. It was the month of February. Pleasant sunshine throughout the day and cool delightful nights. Good and abundant shooting. Duck and snipe, partridge and peafowl. In certain districts an occasional panther or leopard. In the absence of dak bungalows, commodious tents were always provided. There was little or no difficulty about food supplies, and the journeys were by comparatively short stages.

Fred always took his work seriously. Very occasionally he indulged on a little shooting in the early morning or late evening. As a rule he was kept pretty well busy from morning to night. In the morning he received the reports of the subordinate officials and granted interviews. During the day he tramped the surrounding country and villages and saw things for himself. He

heard individual complaints and grievances and had long friendly chats with the headmen. The little children had got to know him by this time and instead of running away frightened when he made his appearance, stood still and greeted him with a shy friendly smile. He always had a cheery word for them and then they ran away giggling to tell their mothers what the Sahib had said. In the evening he dealt with the dak and his files, and he counted himself fortunate if he completed his work before dinner.

After dinner, which was always a lonely affair, the few hours before retiring were devoted to his hobby. He believed a complete change of occupation to be the best method of recreation and relaxation, and a perfect antidote against boredom and monotony. Years ago he had taken up the study of the Russian language, not as a hobby at first, but with a vague idea that the knowledge might become useful to him at some time in his future career. As soon as he had mastered the language he became immersed in the study of the literature. From that point to an innate desire for a first-hand knowledge of the country and its people was a natural consequence. He had on several occasions visited Russia. He knew what he want-

ed to see, and he saw it. There were many cases of crude justice and even cruelty, but in every case the underlying motive was the regeneration of the country. In no case was there anything comparable to the acts of brutal savagery, inspired simply by personal caprice, that were unfortunately only too common under the older regime. He did not look for perfection, and he did not find perfection. Where was the perfect administration to be found? Perhaps in the words of the protagonist of pseudo-classicism:—

“For forms of government let fools contest,
Whate’er is best administered, is best.”

On this particular night, his first night in camp, he gave himself up to communion with his own thoughts. So many things had happened in quick succession that he badly wanted to take stock and see clearly where he stood. The Triple Alliance between Bannerji, Major Cathcart, and the Chief of the Intelligence Department in the War Office took him completely by surprise. He had often contemplated the possibility and even the probability of another great war in the immediate future, but he had never for a moment dreamt that India would be anywhere near the scene of actual hostilities. There might of course be internal troubles.

That was a different matter altogether. In the light of what he had heard from Bannerji he reviewed the whole world situation. Several significant incidents helped further to convince him that Bannerji's diagnosis of the general situation was in the main correct. Germany annexed Austria and Czecho-slovakia. Italy was by no means idle. She was openly abetting the Insurgents in Spain. The western end of the chain of isolation was now almost complete, and direct action in the eastern end had already commenced. The obvious place where the two forces would meet to join hands was India.

Preparations for war were being undertaken everywhere throughout the whole world. Russia was one vast arsenal. The budgets for armaments in Germany and Italy, France and England soared sky-high. America followed suit, and even the smaller states of Central Europe began to get busy. Throughout the whole of the five continents there was either actual warfare, or rumours of war and feverish preparations for war. What was India doing in the meantime? Nothing, absolutely nothing. It was deep in the throes of constitutional crises and elections.

"Thank God for The League of Youth," he

muttered aloud.

The mention of The League of Youth reminded him of Sheila and their parting on the steps of the verandah when he visited Headquarters. He knew then that he loved her, and for the moment he was certain that his love was returned. When they met again some time later at his bungalow their old normal friendly relations seemed to have been completely re-established.

"I must be a conceited prig," he said to himself, "to imagine that Sheila was in love with me. Naturally she was excited after the day, and especially when I had promised to throw in my little lot with them. What I mistook for love was simply gratitude and affection. That makes things a little bit easier for me though not very much. I must see her as little as possible before I go on leave. They say that 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.' Perhaps it does, but it will certainly relieve me from the temptation of making a fool of myself."

A few days later he was having his solitary tea when the dak arrived. He had had rather a trying day and was pretty well fagged out. There were more grievances than usual in this particular sub-division. Some of the complaints struck him

as just and legitimate. Yet that very morning the sub-divisional officer had reported that everyone was peaceful and happy, loyal and content. That was a matter he would have to investigate thoroughly. With a weary hand he proceeded to sort out the letters. As usual he divided them up into three neat little piles, official, demi-official, and personal. Suddenly all his weariness vanished into thin air. There staring in the face was a letter from Sheila.

“Dear Fred,

I am going to give you two big surprises. I am coming out to see you to-morrow about fourish. That is the first surprise. The second is that I am bringing along two more people. I could give you not only three but three thousand guesses and even then you would be miles away from the mark. The guessing however, will give you something to do until we arrive. You had better beg, borrow, or steal a few extra cups and saucers, and also brew a plentiful supply of tea. After a thirty miles drive over the dusty roads of the jungle we shall all probably be ‘dying with the drought,’ as Jim the Stationmaster would say.

Sheila.”

She did indeed give him a surprise. It was the very last thing he ever expected that Sheila would pay a visit to his camp. At first he did not bother his head about even trying to guess as to who might be her two companions. He gave himself over completely to the expectant pleasure of meeting her again so soon. He smiled as he remembered his resolution of seeing as little as possible of her before he went on leave.

"After all," he said to himself, "I did not invite her to come to the camp, and I can't very well tell her not to come especially as she is bringing two of her friends. Besides it would be absurd to refuse an unlooked-for gift from the gods."

He tried to do a little bit of gussing with regard to the identity of her possible friends. Her father was out of the question. She would surely have specifically mentioned him if he were to be one of the party. The only other friend of Sheila whom he knew was Mabel Cathcart. The latter was also immediately ruled out of the question as she happened to be thousands and thousands of miles away. It suddenly struck him that he might not have used the word 'friends'. He looked at the letter again. It was the word 'people' she had used. This was a hopeless task

without the faintest evidence of a clue, and he immediately gave up the venture.

He read the letter again and again. Nowhere did he find even the slightest suspicion of sentiment. His conviction grew that Sheila had never thought of him as other than an old and valued friend. In addition the mention of Jim the Stationmaster definitely placed them on the old footing of camaraderie. So be it.

He turned to his dak. It was as dry as the proverbial dust. Now and again his attention wandered. He found it difficult to concentrate. What time would she be likely to arrive? She said about fourish in her letter. That meant anything between three forty-five and four-fifteen or even between three-thirty and four-thirty. How long would she stay? Probably an hour or at most two. Thank the gods for small mercies. The longer the better. What would she look like? How would she be dressed? He hoped she would be in a sari. She looked remote and austere in her natty uniform. What about the tea? In thinking about Sheila herself he forgot all about the arrangements it would be necessary for him to make. He seized hold of his note-book, and jotted down all the things

he could possibly think of in order to provide a sumptuous meal. He would send his peon first thing in the morning to fetch the wherewithal from the nearest town. Better still. Why not give the orders now, in case he might forget them in the morning. He smiled as he murmured to himself:—

“I don’t think there is much chance of my forgetting.”

He called aloud for the peon and also for the Khansaman. To the peon he gave the list with orders to set out in the motor as early as possible in the morning, and bring back his requirements ‘ek dam’ (immediately).

“I have some guests coming for tea to-morrow, Khansaman.”

“Very good, Sahib.”

“There will be three guests. That will mean tea for four in all, including myself.”

“Very good, Sahib.”

“I shall want a very good tea. The very best you can produce.”

“Very good, Sahib.”

“Sandwiches, scones, small cakes, and big cakes.”

“And sweets, Sahib. I can make very good

sweets."

"Yes, of course, and anything else you can think of."

"What time, Sahib?"

"Oh, I don't know really. Half-past three, four, half-past four."

"It doesn't matter, Sahib. Everything will be ready."

"Alright, Khansaman. If it is a very good tea, I'll give you buksheesh."

"Salaam Sahib."

"Salaam, Khansaman."

On the way back to the quarters, the peon remarked:

"Perhaps the Commissioner Sahib is coming to-morrow. Even perhaps the Lord Sahib."

"Pshaw," retorted the Khansaman with utter contempt for the intelligence of the peon, "it's a mem-sahib that is surely coming."

Having completed all his arrangements Fred at last settled down to deal with his dak. Fortunately for him it was not a particularly heavy one that day, and he managed to complete his business before dinner. Throughout his solitary meal, and even afterwards when he was quietly smoking his pipe which kept continually

going out and needed relighting, Sheila was constantly in his thoughts in one form or another. At Garnacanty Sheila in bathing-kit in the canoe on the river, or in her riding-kit on the racecourse. Sheila on the parade ground at Headquarters, but especially Sheila on the steps of the verandah in the moonlight. Finally he got up and prepared to retire for the night.

"Evidently on her side there is no question of love," said he sadly and hopelessly. "She must not be allowed to suspect for a moment that there is any question of love on my side either. Friends and comrades. So be it."

Before three-thirty the next day Fred came along to see how the arrangements had progressed. He found everything in readiness. Both the Khansaman and the bearer were experienced men, and knowing that the Sahib wanted a special tea, they spared neither time nor trouble. They had managed even to commandeer some beautiful flowers.

"Everything all right, Sahib?" asked the Khansaman.

"Everything is very nice indeed, Khansaman. You have gone to a lot of trouble. Thank you very much indeed."

He did not enquire where the flowers came from or the silver tea set. He always found that those questions were best left unasked. He was certain, however, that they did not belong to him. Willing servants can do a lot both in the bungalow but especially in the jungle for a kind and sympathetic master.

The camp was situated on a slightly elevated piece of ground, and the tea was laid out on a table beneath the shade of the spreading branches of a large banyan tree. From where he stood Fred could see the road for miles at a stretch, the long straight monotonous road of the jungle, bordered here and there by tall trees. He would have liked to remain where he was, and watch for the first signs of the approaching motor, but he did not like before his servants to appear over-anxious. All his servants, however, knew by this time that there was something special afoot.

"I'll wait here, Sahib, and tell you when they are coming," remarked the Khansaman quietly.

"Thank you very much, Khansaman. I have a small job of work to do."

Fred retired to his capacious tent. He sat down at his desk and lit a cigarette. He seemed to have forgotten all about the small job of work.

In front of him was a double snap-shot in a silver frame. He always brought it about with him. Sheila and he were on horseback. They had just come back from a ride. His father had snapped them both and Bannerji had taken the whole group. A corner of Garnacanty Castle appeared in the background. Taking up the photograph in his hand he scanned it thoroughly. He remembered the evening well when it was taken. It was the first evening after their mad gallop on the race-course. The photo was a very good one and the features of the three were clearly defined. He always had thought it a pity that Bannerji was not included in the picture. It would have been a perfect memento of a glorious time.

Holding the photo a little closer he concentrated his attention on Sheila. The pony she was riding had one foreleg lifted off the ground and its head was thrown slightly backwards. Sheila was bending forward with the reins held loosely in her left hand whilst with her right she was gently patting the pony's neck. Her laughing face was turned directly towards the camera. He himself was smiling at Sheila, and his father was smiling at them both. It was a photo full of life and animation, joy and happiness.

He heard footsteps approaching the tent, and he hastily put down the picture in front of him again.

"They are coming, Sahib," said the Khan-saman.

Fred went out. The signs of the approach of the motor were distinctly visible. A long trail of dust was being wafted leisurely across the fields by a gentle breeze. The nickel-plated radiator flashed in the sun. In a very short time he was able to make out the figures in the car, and a moment later he was able to distinguish them clearly. There were two men in the front and two women at the back. Sheila probably and another woman. Yes, it was Sheila. He now recognised the sari. He also recognised the burly Sikh driver, but he had no idea as to the identity of the man sitting by his side. Sheila was the first to see him, and she waved her hand. In a few moments more he was opening the door and helping her to alight.

"How is this for punctuality, Fred?" enquired Sheila laughing.

"Easy to be punctual when you allow yourself a two hours margin."

"Two hours margin, how are you? I'm not

going to quarrel with you anyway in case you may refuse to give us tea. This is Mabel Cathcart, my former governess and my dearest friend."

Fred shook hands with a handsome, fresh-complexioned, fair-haired woman, who looked young enough to be Sheila's contemporary.

"Fred is the big noise in this district, Mabel. He has the power of life and death, and he can even have you up for not thinking in the regulation manner."

"He can't have me up for my present thoughts anyway," retorted Mabel smiling. "This is my husband."

The two men took stock of each other as they shook hands.

"Efficient and reliable," thought Major Cathcart.

"Clever, determined, and straight," thought Fred.

"You must tell me your present thoughts," exclaimed Sheila.

"I will not, you imperious little monkey, even though you are Commandant of The League of Youth."

"I appeal to Major Cathcart," said Sheila.

"Am I an imperious little monkey?"

"Bad tactics, Sheila. Never ask a husband to give evidence against his wife. Why not appeal to the judge?"

"Yes," cried Mabel, with a humorous twinkle in her eye. "Let's appeal to the judge who is bound to give an impartial decision."

Sheila kept silent.

"Well, judge," added Major Cathcart, "we are all anxiously awaiting your verdict."

"Nothing doing," replied Fred, shaking his head.

"Why?" persisted Mabel, who was thoroughly enjoying herself.

"Not sufficient evidence."

"But you have known Sheila for ages."

"Not half as long as you have known her."

"We'll let you off with an opinion then. We won't insist on a formal verdict."

Fred looked at Sheila, who shook her fist at him in mock anger.

"No intimidation, Sheila," said Major Cathcart. "Otherwise the verdict will go by default."

"I shall very gladly give you my opinion," replied Fred, pretending to be very serious. "With regard to the epithet 'little', and the word

‘monkey,’ I am afraid that even on *prima facie* evidence alone I shall have to rule them out of all cognisance. Now we come—.”

“To tea,” interrupted Sheila.

They all laughed and proceeded to the pleasant shade of the spreading branches of the large banyan tree. At a sign from Fred. Sheila took the place of hostess, and began to pour out tea.

“I must say I like a man’s tea,” said Mabel. “You sit down comfortably at a table and help yourself to all the nice things without the slightest bother or inconvenience.”

“I quite agree,” rejoined Major Cathcart. “It is always a difficult matter in case of accidents to know what to do when you hold a tea-cup in one hand, and a creamy, juicy bun in the other.”

“I remember a very particular incident,” laughed Fred, “which happened when I first came out. The Commissioner’s wife always made it a point of asking the latest joined recruits of the Service to tea in order to test their social capabilities. Whoever passed the test was placed immediately on her entertainment list and whoever in her opinion failed to come up to the required standard was postponed for further consideration. One such recruit was presented with a cup of tea

full to overflowing, and a particularly enticing cake which looked innocent enough on the outside. He nibbled at the cake with fatal results. All the creamy juice did not exactly go where it was intended to go. To requisition a handkerchief was impossible under the circumstances. At that precise moment the Commissioner's wife elected to ask him the name of the boat on which he had travelled to India. The Commissioner saved the situation by producing a small table and answering his wife's question.

"Failed, I suppose," queried Major Cathcart.

"Yes, but the incident had a peculiar sequel, a kind of Nemesis. A few years later she eloped with the young recruit's uncle who happened to be in the cavalry. He deserted her after six months."

"Served her jolly well right," remarked Sheila. "Any little innocent surprises like that for us this evening, Fred?"

"No, everything is all square and above board."

"And 'lashings and lavings' of it," added Sheila.

"By the way," remarked Major Cathcart, "you do yourself well in camp in the matter of

accommodation, don't you? Three large tents and hosts of little ones in the offing."

"Well, one is a kind of reception-room, dining-room, and office combined. Another is a bed-room and dressing-room."

"And the third?"

"For any stray visitor who is always welcome. Would you care to come out for a few days? The shooting here is not at all bad."

"I should like to stay to-night, if it wouldn't be too much bother. I have brought along some bedding and a change."

"Splendid. No bother at all. I shall be delighted."

That is a surprise for you, isn't it? asked Sheila.

"A very pleasant surprise."

"Not half the surprise that my father and I got yesterday evening."

"How was that?"

"About a week ago my father had a letter from Major Cathcart stating that it was just possible that he might be coming out to India in the near future. Yesterday evening he arrived complete with wife."

"To the great consternation of them all,"

laughed Mabel.

"Rather to the great delectation of us all," rejoined Sheila.

"I also got somewhat of a surprise," remarked Mabel. "My husband was away in London. Late one evening I got a wire stating that if I'd care to have a little air holiday, I should come to London as soon as possible. I arrived at eight o'clock the following morning, and at ten we started for India. And here we are."

"Were you successful in your guesses, Fred, as to who were going to be your visitors?" queried Sheila.

"No, I wasn't. You were quite right when you said that even with three thousand guesses I should be miles off the target."

"Did you try very very hard?" asked Mabel shyly.

"I must honestly confess I didn't. I tried to think of Sheila's friends. The only one I knew was yourself, and I thought you were thousands and thousands of miles away."

"So I was less than a week ago."

"Then I looked at the letter again, and found that Sheila had written 'people' not friends. I gave up the task as hopeless."

"But you were not very disappointed, were you?"

Before Fred had time to reply, Sheila interposed:—

"Mabel, did you ever hear the story of the little lady who wanted to know too much?"

"No, Sheila."

"You did, Major Cathcart, didn't you?"

"Of course I did. As a matter of fact it was I who told it to you ages and ages ago when you yourself were very little."

"What is the story?" asked Fred.

"You tell it, Sheila. I want to see if you remember it all right."

"Very well," replied Sheila. "Here goes. Once upon a time, and a very good time it was too, there was a little lady and she was very popular with everybody. From morning till night she went about eternally asking questions of all the people whom she chanced to meet. At first nobody minded. As a matter of fact most of them rather enjoyed what they looked on as a kind of a joke. Naturally she did not get very truthful replies at all times, but of course that was to be expected. Gradually, however, they began to get tired, and to give a wide berth to the

little lady, until at last she was left sadly and completely alone."

"And she died of a broken heart," suggested Mabel.

"No. She died of atrophy of the imagination. She had killed the romance of wonder in a continual accumulation of facts."

"That will never happen to me anyway, because I am always in search of the wonder of romance."

There was an awkward silence for a moment but Major Cathcart gallantly came to the rescue.

"The story I told you, Sheila, ended in quite a different manner. The little lady died a natural death but a very lonely death. She went up to Heaven, and knocked very gently, as was her way, for admission. The Keeper of the Gate told her that for the present he could admit her only to the lower story. She must expiate her fault by remaining there for five hundred thousand million years."

"What a terrible sentence," they all cried.

"It wasn't really, you know. Five hundred thousand million years is practically nothing when compared to eternity and it passes in no time."

"I heard a third version of the story," said

Fred, "which differs from the other two versions in a remarkable way. The Keeper of the Gate refused admission to the little lady. She sat down outside in a very disconsolate manner. Everyone who passed in had the right to ask her a question, but she looked so depressed and forlorn that very few exercised their right. One day a big pompous man arrived, loaded with hundreds and hundreds of files, which were all securely fastened with any amount of red tape. He knocked at the Gate in a bumptious manner, as was his usual way. The Keeper of the Gate sternly refused him admission, and banged the door in his face. Moreover anyone who passed in had the right to examine any or all of the files. In the beginning he was so very nasty over the business that all who entered took the greatest pleasure in putting him to as much bother as they possibly could.

'I should like to give you a word of advice,' said the little lady.

'What is it' growled the bumptious fellow.

'You give yourself a lot of unnecessary bother in fastening and unfastening those files. If I were you, I should leave them all open.'

"Perhaps you are right. Will you help me?"

"Certainly, with very great pleasure."

"It took them a long time to open out all the files, and undo the red tape of which they made a large bonfire. Nobody now even bothered to look at the open files as they passed in."

"I am really very sorry," said the bumptious fellow, who was now no longer bumptious but very humble and courteous. "I made a very serious mistake in trying to be too secret for no reason at all. What are you outside here for? Perhaps I can help you as you helped me."

"I was very foolish in asking too many questions."

"Now all this time the Keeper had his ear cocked inside the door. As soon as ever he heard them expressing regret for their faults he opened wide the portals. Hand in hand they entered and lived happy ever after."

"Words taken from the imagination of the District Magistrate of Tureemapur," quoted Major Cathcart, "with special reference to Indian politics, and introducing to our notice the fundamental differences between Democracy and Bureaucracy."

"You have got a wonderful imagination, Fred," added Sheila. "I think you are wasting

your time in administrative work. Why not take up fiction? It is far less exacting, and would probably be much more remunerative."

"Anyhow," said Mabel, "I think that is by far the nicest version of the three. I like stories with happy endings."

"So do I," agreed Sheila. "It is now our misfortune to have to make an end of happy beginnings. We ought to be making a move, Mabel, if we want to get back to Tureemapur before dark."

Major Cathcart went off to superintend the removal of his luggage to the visitors' tent and after a little while he was joined by Mabel. Sheila and Fred were left alone.

"Where are we now, Sheila?"

"It is very difficult to say, Fred, but I think we are very very far from a happy ending."

CHAPTER TWELVE

As they were speeding back to Turcemapur, Mabel turned to Sheila and asked:—

“Why didn’t you tell me, Sheila?”

“Tell you what?” countered Sheila.

“That you and Fred were in love with each other.”

Sheila kept silence for a while, and stared straight ahead. Mabel noticed that she was pale and tired. Her eyes had a listless expression, an expression almost of despair. She had looked so different in the camp. Her eyes shone brilliantly. Her face had been animated with a glow of excitement.

“Perhaps,” thought Mabel, “it is only a natural reaction and will pass away again quickly.”

Aloud she continued:—

“Sorry, Sheila, I do not want to butt into your confidence against your wish.”

Sheila turned towards her with a sad smile:—

“I never in my life had any secrets from you, Mabel, and I do not wish to have any secrets from

you now. I meant to tell you all about it, but I was waiting for a propitious time. After all you only arrived yesterday, and we have had a very busy evening and morning. Now, however, is as good a time as any other. What did you think of him, Mabel?"

"Of Fred?"

"Yes."

"He is one of the handsomest men I have ever seen, and I should think his character is in consonance with his outward appearance. It strikes me that he would prefer to die rather than do a mean or ignoble action. He has rather a keen sense of humour, but on the whole he is rather serious than otherwise. Have I got him right?"

"Perfectly. How did you know that we were in love with each other?"

Mabel laughed.

"My dear, if you had shouted out the fact to each other at the top of your voices, it couldn't have been plainer. The way you waved your hand to him from the car when we were approaching the camp gave me the first inkling, and when he was helping you to alight it became as plain as a pike-staff. During tea you were both bub-

bling over with suppressed excitement. When you headed me off from my chaffing, I sensed that everything was not as it should be for one reason or another, and I knew that I had put my foot in it somehow. I am very sorry, Sheila. Please forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, Mabel. You could not possibly be aware of the exact position of affairs."

"Would you like to tell me now or later on?"

"Now. It will be a relief to me. You know, of course, that Fred and I had been friends for many years, in fact ever since we first met at Garnacanty Castle."

"Yes, I knew that, and I was always anxious to meet him. Somehow or other the meeting never materialised."

"We continued to be great friends until a short time ago, when suddenly in one day everything changed."

"Have you any idea what brought about the change?"

"Not the faintest, but I think I know when the change first occurred."

"What exactly happened?"

"Fred came to visit our Headquarters. During the parade I pinned on the lapel of his coat the badge of the League of Youth. It was then that I first noticed the change in our relations. That evening when we said good-bye on the steps of the verandah, I knew for certain that we loved each other."

"Then why are you so sad and depressed? You ought to be in the seventh heaven of joy and happiness."

Sheila smiled a sad pathetic little smile.

"It isn't so simple as all that. In the first place our marriage would mean a definite end to Fred's career in the Service."

"Perhaps Fred would be inclined to choose his, but especially, your happiness in preference to any career."

"Perhaps, but he has a very stern sense of duty. In any case do you think that I should ever be really happy if I allowed him to sacrifice his career for my sake? There is another point, however, which makes the case absolutely hopeless."

"What is that?"

Sheila was again silent for a while before she replied:—

"You know that I have devoted my life to the service of my country."

"Yes, but—"

"Wait a minute please, Mabel. You know too that I am the Commandant of the League of Youth."

"Why, of course."

"Without being conceited I may say that I have a good deal of influence over the organisation."

"As a matter of fact, you are the organisation."

"Do you think my influence would be enhanced in any way by my marriage with a Government official?"

"It certainly would not be enhanced in any way."

"Do you think I would be able to devote myself in the same whole-hearted manner to my work? Wouldn't my husband have a legitimate claim on some of my time?"

"Yes, I quite see that point."

"Lastly it would break my father's heart."

Mabel looked at her in open-eyed astonishment.

"I think," continued Sheila, "you have not

quite grasped my meaning. My father could not love Fred more if he were his own son, and under other circumstances our marriage would give him the very greatest pleasure. You know my father well. You remember how he gave you *carte blanche* with regard to my education and upbringing. Afterwards he pursued the same policy with regard to myself. He never interfered with my inclinations. He was anxious that I should find my own feet and choose my own career. I remember well the evening when I told him that I had finally determined on my choice. He declared that it was the happiest moment of his life."

"What was it that caused you to make this particular choice?"

The example of your husband."

The rest of the journey was covered in silence. Each was occupied with her own thoughts. Mabel reflected on how her husband had given up his profession without the slightest hesitation in order to serve his country in a less conspicuous and more dangerous manner. His time was now never his own. At a moment's notice he was liable to receive orders to go somewhere, anywhere on a secret and confidential mission. There

was plenty of excitement, of course, but seldom any rest. His life was always in danger whether at home or abroad. Nevertheless he was outwardly always calm and imperturbable. He never complained about his onerous duties. He only expressed regret to her that he was so often compelled to leave her alone. She understood and played the game. There was always a cheery word at parting and a warm welcome on his return. It was only at night time, when he had lost consciousness in sleep, that she occasionally had a glimpse of the perilous times he must have encountered. She remembered one occasion in particular when he had returned from a longer absence than usual. He looked pale and haggard and utterly exhausted. He retired early that night, but he had a most miserable time. He tossed from side to side. He moaned in his sleep, and frequently murmured confused incoherent phrases. Finally, with a loud yell he jumped completely out of bed. His own shout awakened him. He seemed a bit dazed for a moment and looked around wildly. Suddenly recognising where he was, he said with a rueful smile:—

“Sorry for disturbing you, Mabel. I must have had a bit of a nightmare. Probably some-

thing I had for dinner that didn't click with its surroundings."

She knew that he had eaten practically no dinner but she preserved a tactful silence. Small wonder then that the impressionable Sheila had been stirred by his example.

Sheila's thoughts were bitter sweet. Sweet with regard to the pleasant memories of the past, and bitter with regard to the actualities of the present. Suddenly she pulled herself up with a jerk, and began to upbraid herself:—

"Heroine indeed," she scoffed. "You never had any trouble worth speaking of throughout your whole life. You were always allowed to do practically whatever you wished. You decided to serve your country. What service have you done so far? Nothing except what has given pleasure to yourself. That is not real service. It is simply pure downright selfishness. The very first moment you are asked to make the slightest sacrifice, you whine and complain. You are prepared to shed tears of bitter sorrow on your unfortunate and miserable plight. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. That is not the stuff from which heroines are made. Remember what your father told you about the Tommies

going over the top, singing as they went to almost certain death. Grin and bear it. Smile. Service is sacrifice. What does your selfish happiness matter with the welfare of hundreds, thousands, nay millions of your people?"

Almost immediately after dinner Bannerji went off to his study. During dinner Sheila more than surprised Mabel. She seemed to be at the very top of her form. She mildly ragged her father about various things. She twitted Mabel on having evidently found the elixir of youth and beauty. She was amusing and even scintillating. Stuck deep in her heart, however, was the sword of pain and sorrow. She continued in the same strain until they were both ready to retire for the night.

"Do you mind if I give you a bit of advice, Sheila?"

"Please do. I shall be very glad of your advice now and at all times."

"Have you told Fred that you loved him?"

"No."

"Are you sure that he knows that you love him?"

"I am not certain, of course, but I think he does."

"Men are peculiar where women are concerned. They are liable to think all kinds of things. Generally they are guided by facts whereas women are influenced a good deal by their inherent intuition. You are sure that he loves you?"

"Absolutely certain."

"Although he never told you?"

"No, he never told me."

"Fred will never be sure unless you tell him."

"Do you think I ought to tell him?"

"I certainly do. Even though the case may be hopeless, there is always the pleasure of knowing that you are beloved."

"I shall tell him," said Sheila quietly.

"Good-night, Sheila."

"Good-night, Mabel."

About the same time quite a different scene was being enacted in the camp. Major Cathcart and Fred had dined. The dinner things had been cleared away, and the servants had retired to the quarters for the night. Everything was still and silent as the grave.

"A good night, a good place, and a good time for confidence," remarked Major Cathcart.

"Almost perfect," replied Fred smiling.

"I expect you were surprised when we turned up this evening."

"Very much so indeed, especially as I thought you both were in England. At the same time I was very pleased. Visitors are rare, and they are always welcome. Camp life can become very monotonous. I was particularly pleased, however, to meet you."

"Why?"

"Bannerji had told me all about the Triple Alliance between himself and you and the Chief of the Intelligence Department at the War Office."

"And Bannerji has told me all about the Triple Alliance between himself and yourself and Sheila. You were serious, of course, when you said you were prepared to throw in your lot with them?"

"Yes, quite serious."

"To what extent are you prepared to go?"

"The limit."

"Even to the extent of resigning the Service?"

"Yes, even to the extent of resigning the Service."

"Immediately?"

"Yes, immediately."

"I am very glad. From the moment I saw you I felt certain of your answer, but I wanted to be quite sure. Even though I consider myself to be a good judge of character, I sometimes make mistakes. Perhaps, however, you do not realise what you are letting yourself in for, and you can withhold your decision until you have heard the exact position of affairs."

"My decision had already been made."

Major Cathcart looked at him and smiled.

"Very well. I shall tell you how matters stand, and then explain to you our exact plan of campaign. Things are moving so rapidly that even our anti-diluvian politicians are beginning to sit up and take notice. They are still hesitant and bewildered. Their old panaceas have been taken from them. The League of Nations no longer functions. They do not know what to do. They are waiting and hoping like Micawber for something to turn up. Their waiting days, however, are numbered. Public opinion is steadily becoming more and more insistent for a more definite and decisive foreign policy. In the meantime they have been knocked off their omniscient perch, and are more amenable to suggestions than heretofore. The Chief of the

Intelligence is listened to with respect, and the Military, Naval, and Air authorities are no longer snubbed."

"How does all this affect India?"

"Very little in one way, and very much in another. India scarcely comes in at all in the present general scheme. At home the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force are being rapidly expanded, and equipped with the most modern weapons. In India proper a few units have been mechanised, but the numerical strength of the Army still remains the same. A few cruisers have been added to guard a coast-line which is roughly four times the size of Britain. A little money has been spent on a projected port of call on the West coast of Africa, and much money and labour have been expended on the Singapore base. The whole trend of the present policy is to make England impregnable. The other states in the Commonwealth of Nations, including India, have got to look out for themselves."

"The other states in the Commonwealth of Nations are more or less in a position to do so, but I am afraid that is not the case with India."

"I know, and it is for that reason that India

is so much affected. There is practically no possibility of the invasion of South Africa, Canada, or Australia. India on the other hand seems destined to be the arena of a most sanguinary struggle."

"As far as I can see we have lost the initiative, which is always fatal in warfare. We have forgotten or discarded the principle that attack is the best defence, and we are concentrating on defence from attack from an unknown quarter."

"Therein lies our greatest weakness. Our politicians cannot or will not discriminate between friends and enemies. They want to be all things to all men."

"An attitude which is both ridiculous and absurd at the present time," remarked Fred.

"I quite agree. A world show-down between Fascism and Democracy is inevitable. We have got to take sides one way or another and the sooner the better. Personally I cannot see any reason for the slightest hesitation. We are already under certain obligations to France, and France is allied with Russia. America has definitely declared herself on the side of Democracy."

"Perhaps Russia is the cause of the trouble. The British public would not stomach an alliance

with godless Russia."

"The British public does not give a tuppenny damn whether Russia is godless or not. It is not the British public but our High Church politics that causes this unfortunate shilly-shallying. Whenever the Church has been allowed to interfere in the administration of the State, it has invariably wrought ruin and disaster."

"'Tis true, 'tis pity; and pity 'tis, 'tis true," quoted Fred.

"All this, however, is wandering away from the point. Let's get back to India and to you. One advantage of the present state of affairs is that the politicians are only too glad to snatch at any straw which they think will help in extricating them from the hopeless muddle which they have made of things. They are beginning to see that India is a danger point. On that account they have given a half-hearted blessing to the Triple Alliance. Official recognition they dare not give. It doesn't matter. We are in a position now to force their hands. I have come out to India with practically full powers, and that is where you come in."

Major Cathcart paused and looked searchingly at Fred.

"'Barkis is willin','" smiled Fred.

"Willing to obey all orders whatever they may be?"

Fred nodded his assent.

"By the way have you any knowledge of the Russian language?"

"Yes."

"A fairly good working knowledge?"

"More than that. I think I know it almost as well as my own language."

"This is perfectly splendid. What on earth put you on to Russian?"

"The taking over of Gilgit. I thought we were bound to be mixed up with Russia at one time or another, and that the knowledge would be useful."

"Yes. Have you ever been to Russia?"

"Several times."

"Good. You will be going there once again soon. Your destination is Petrograd."

Fred looked astonished and Major Cathcart laughed.

"I expect," continued Major Cathcart, "that has sprung a bit of a surprise on you."

"It certainly has. When do I start?"

"Here is another little surprise. I'd like you

to start almost immediately. Can you be ready within a week?"

"As far as I am personally concerned I can be ready to start within twenty-four hours, but there are many other arrangements to be made which will probably cause a good deal of delay."

"Such as?"

Well for one thing there is the question of the appointment of my successor in the District. It will take at least a fortnight even to get a reply from the Secretariat."

"You can leave all those arrangements to me. As I told you I have come out here practically as a plenipotentiary. All I want you to do is to hand over to me your resignation in writing. Allege as your excuse 'urgent private affairs'."

Fred wrote out his resignation and handed it over without a word.

"I shall be very much surprised if within forty-eight hours from noon to-morrow your resignation is not accepted, and you will then find yourself a free agent as far as the Indian Civil Service is concerned. And now for your new duties.

Major Cathcart in detail explained what was required. He himself would be obliged to

remain in India indefinitely in order to supervise and coordinate the arrangements at this end. Fred was to take his place in Russia and act as his liaison officer. His stay there was also likely to be indefinite. It all depended on the outbreak of hostilities and how long the hostilities would last.

"The Kathleen Mavourneen system, I suppose," remarked Fred.

"What is that?" queried Major Cathcart.

"It may be for years and it may be for ever."

Major Cathcart became very grave as he replied:—

"There is no use disguising the fact that you will be in constant danger. At the present time Russia is honeycombed with spies from every country, but their counter-espionage system is as efficient, if not more efficient than any other such service in the whole world. You will be spied upon but you will also have an unobtrusive and effective bodyguard. Even then I want you to promise me that you will take no unnecessary risks. Remember that you will be much more useful to us alive than dead, and that it will be very difficult to replace you."

Fred gave the required promise and Major

Cathcart again went into details. Maps and codes were produced, and the system of communication meticulously explained. No expense was to be spared. There was ample credit at his disposal. In the first instance up to one million sterling, and that amount, if necessary, could be increased without the slightest difficulty.

"You will make your own way to Gilgit."

"There won't be very much difficulty about that."

"There might easily be if things were not prepared for you beforehand. You will be met at Gilgit, and be conducted along the main route until you arrive at Petrograd. After that, you will carry out instructions. I think that is all. Have you any questions to ask?"

"No. You have made everything absolutely clear."

Major Cathcart stood up and went to the door of the tent.

"It's the dawn already," he exclaimed.

The two men went out and looked towards the East. The cold pearly-grey horizon was already beginning to assume a warmer flesh-coloured tint. Even at that early hour sounds of human activity travelled faintly in the still morning air

from the neighbouring villages. A solitary ryot, looming large in the uncertain light of the dawn, plodded slowly past in order to commence another arduous day's toil.

"I think the best thing I can do now," continued Major Cathcart, "is to make a beat for Tureemapur. I can have forty winks on the way back. Any difficulty in getting the car out at this time of the morning?"

"Not the slightest."

Fred rang out for the choukidar who came trotting along almost immediately with his brass-tipped stave and his blanket trailing from one shoulder.

"Yes, Sahib."

"Tell the bearer to bring chhoti haziri and the driver the car. I want both immediately."

"Very good, Sahib."

In an incredibly short space of time both the chhoti haziri and the car arrived. While the men were drinking their tea, the bearer loaded up the luggage.

"When shall I start?" enquired Fred.

Major Cathcart pondered for a while and then quietly replied:—

"This day week. Everything will be in readi-

ness by then. Will that suit you?"

"Perfectly."

"My movements will be very uncertain in the meantime. I may not have a chance of seeing you again. Good-bye and good luck."

"Good-bye."

Within forty-eight hours Fred's resignation was accepted with orders to hand over immediately to the Senior Deputy Collector. The same day he had a short cryptic note from Sheila:—

"Dear Fred,

Come and dine with us the night before you leave and bring your driver.

Sheila."

The four days that followed were spent in a hectic endeavour to dispose of all his goods and chattels. He had been ordered to travel light, a tooth-brush, a wallet, and a revolver. He heaved a sigh of relief as he drove out to Bannerji's residence. Everything was in readiness at last. He was setting out early on the following morning.

Sheila and her father and Mabel Cathcart were standing on the steps of the verandah as he drove up. Bannerji put his arm through Fred's and led

him into the drawing-room. Sheila and Mabel followed but not immediately.

"Just a minute, Mabel," said Sheila. "I want to give a message to Fred's driver."

She tripped down the steps, and gave some orders in a low tone. The driver salaamed and disappeared with the car.

Dinner was a very cheery affair. It seemed as if everyone was determined to make the best of the last few moments. Bannerji was delighted to have Fred, and Fred was delighted to have Sheila. Sheila had all she loved in the world around her.

"Major Cathcart not here?" enquired Fred.

"Sherlock Holmes," retorted Sheila.

"Yes, I've been doing a little bit of Pelmanism recently just to pass away the time, and I find it is extraordinarily good for improving powers of observation. I think you ought to have a shot at it, Sheila. You have plenty of time on your hands."

"I can testify to Sheila's powers of observation," interposed Mabel, "as it was I who was partly responsible for her training. I can also testify that the time on her hands is much more profitably employed."

“Why not try cross-word puzzles, Fred?” added Sheila. “I think you would find them less arduous and more beneficial than Pelmanism.”

“Beaten at the start,” said Fred turning to Bannerji with a smile. “I appeal to you for assistance. Two to one are rather unfair odds.”

“The best way I can help you is to teach Mabel and Sheila the obvious advantages of the direct method.”

“How?” cried Sheila and Mabel in one breath.

“By giving a straightforward answer to a simple and direct question.”

“All square,” murmured Sheila. “Carry on, Dad.”

“A few hours after his return from your camp, Major Cathcart disappeared, and we have not heard tale or tidings of him since.”

“Leaving his poor neglected wife shivering and pale, heart-broken and forlorn,” remarked Sheila.

“Nothing of the kind,” retorted Mabel. “I have been so busy since I arrived that I scarcely have had time to think. Sheila has commandeered me as her personal assistant. Once upon a time I used to be able to issue orders, but now

the boot is on the other foot."

"Is she a very hard taskmaster?" queried Fred.

"No tales out of school, Mabel," interposed Sheila. "Curiosity, thy name is—,"

"The whole human species," finished Bannerji, "with the animal species running a close second."

The gay badinage suddenly ceased as soon as they entered the drawing-room. Fred was wanted on the phone. Major Cathcart had rung him up to say that everything was O.K. This brought them all down to the hard facts of the situation. Fred was leaving early in the morning. They might never see him again.

After a little while he stood up to take his leave, and they all went out with him to the steps of the verandah.

"Hallo," exclaimed Fred. "My car seems to have disappeared. That is your car, Sheila, isn't it?"

"Yes, that is mine. I'll run you home, Fred. I am afraid I had the cheek to send your driver on an errand without asking your permission."

"What nonsense. Of course you were perfectly right to make use of him when you wanted

him."

"Or when she didn't want him," thought Mabel. She guessed and appreciated the object of the little manoeuvre. Sheila was going to follow her advice.

Sheila drove along in silence until they reached the bungalow. Fred jumped out and turned round to say good-bye, but Sheila stopped the engine.

"I'm coming in for a minute, Fred."

Fred led the way towards the drawing-room.

"Not there, Fred. Let's go into your study."

Sheila went forward to the desk and sat down in the chair usually occupied by Fred.

"Will you stand over there, please, Fred? Just opposite to me."

Fred wondered what was going to happen. He noticed that Sheila was tense with excitement. Her hand trembled ever so slightly as she pointed the place where she wanted him to take up his position.

"Does this remind you of anything, Fred?"

"I'm afraid it doesn't."

Sheila kept her eyes lowered and her fingers were playing nervously with a paper-weight.

"Don't you remember your informal trial

of Rai Bahadur."

"Yes. Of course I do."

"You were sitting where I am now, and the Rai Bahadur was standing in your present position."

"That's right. And you and Captain Umrao Singh were sitting on either side of me."

"The Rai Bahadur was on his trial for malicious libel and gross defamation of character."

"Yes."

"You are on your trial now on a different charge."

"Carry on."

"You are the Collector and District Magistrate of Tureemapur?"

"Yes."

"You know that I am the Commandant of the League of Youth?"

"Yes."

"You are accused of theft."

"Not Guilty."

"Pray be serious. You have not yet heard the specific charge."

"What is it?"

"In that you stole and are still in possession of one of the most valuable assets of the

Commandant of the League of Youth."

"To wit?"

"Her heart. What have you got to say in answer to that charge?"

Sheila looked up at him for the first time. There was no mistaking the love light in her eyes.

Fred was round the table in a trice and took her in his arms. Their lips met in the first ecstatic kiss of mutual love.

"You haven't yet answered the charge," said Sheila, nestling still closer to him.

"If I did steal your heart, I did it unconsciously, but I am glad I did it. If I have your heart in my possession, you can say good-bye to it, because you will never get it back."

"Won't you give me yours in exchange?"

"I am frightfully sorry, Sheila. I can't."

"Why?"

"I have already given it away irrevocably."

"To whom?"

"I'll give you three guesses."

"I don't want to guess, Fred. I'd like you to tell me."

"I have already given it to you for keeps, Sheila."

"And I shall keep it for ever."

Another long embrace followed.

"By the way, Fred, you are not very curious."

"Why?"

"You never made any enquiries about your driver."

"He'll turn up all right some time, I expect. What does it matter anyhow?"

"I sent him away in order that I could have the last few minutes alone with you."

"My darling."

"My beloved."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"How well you are looking," they all cried when Major Cathcart turned up about a month after Fred's departure.

"And why not?" he replied. "I have had a most glorious time."

Major Cathcart was indeed looking very well. Years seemed to have slipped from his shoulders. He appeared to be buoyant, sanguine, and triumphant.

"Do you know," he continued, "that I am going to be even 'weller'? I am going to sit and browse on the fat of the land in a leisurely luxuriousness whilst I watch you other people sweating blood and working forty hours a day."

"What an awful pity," sighed Mabel.

"What is a pity?" enquired Sheila.

"My husband's present mood. He will part with no information whilst in his present condition. Too well I know the symptoms."

"What do you do usually under a such circumstances?"

"Possess my soul in patience. Sometimes a whisky and soda has the desired effect. It makes him effervesce and bubble over."

"No harm in trying anyway," remarked Sheila, who gave the necessary orders to the butler.

"And in the meantime," suggested Bannerji, "If Ulysses is not willing to go into the details of his wanderings, he may be persuaded to give us an inkling of the nature of the work which it will give him such pleasure to watch."

Before Bannerji had finished speaking, the butler had brought in the drinks.

"This is a very excellent idea," said Major Cathcart, helping himself to a whisky and soda. "I now propose to begin at the beginning."

"A very good and proper place to make a start," confirmed Mabel.

"If I have any more of your rude remarks I shall immediately dry up."

"Have another whisky and soda."

"That, I may mention, is a more sensible and suitable suggestion. I am not quite ready for another just yet, but it is undoubtedly good to behold the ingredients in the offing. Bacchus is ever a jovial and solacing companion."

"As far as I remember," retorted Mabel, "Bacchus never knew the taste nor even the smell of whisky."

"Oh, shut up, Mabel," cried Sheila. "We'll never get any information at this rate of going."

Sheila was fervently hoping that Major Cathcart would have some news of Fred.

"Thank you, Sheila. I am very glad you are on my side. This little exhibition will give you a small idea of what I have to put up with whenever I am compelled to be domesticated."

He smiled at Sheila and addressed himself to her first.

"Fred arrived at Petrograd without any untoward adventure. I had a communication from him only this morning, and he is fit and well. He wound up with the word 'love'. I expect we all go shares in that. In any case I returned the amount duly doubled. Any dissenting voice? No. Well then, passed unanimously. It doesn't seem very long ago since I said good-bye to him in camp and now there is nearly a whole continent between us."

Major Cathcart paused in order to sip his whisky and soda. Nobody said a word. They all waited patiently for what was to follow. In spite

of his insouciance they felt that he had some important information to impart.

"When I left here after my return from Fred's camp," he continued, "I proceeded to the biggest noise in India."

"The Viceroy?" ventured Bannerji.

"Guessed it in one."

"Any difficulty in getting an appointment?"

"On the contrary he was expecting me, and along with him was the Commander-in-Chief. The appointment had already been made from Whitehall. That was the reason why I was in such a hurry when I returned from camp."

"Were you received in your private capacity or as a Government emissary?"

"I was received as a mechanisation expert who was to be accorded all possible facilities, and whose advice was to be followed whenever practicable."

"A pretty tall order, wasn't it?"

"Yes. I should never have received such wide powers were it not for the fact that our politicians had the wind up properly. Moreover my task was considerably lightened by another fortuitous little circumstance. The C-in-C and I happen to be close personal friends. We

were together at the Staff College, and have kept in touch with each other ever since. It did not take me very long to give a general outline of the main idea. He himself had already foreseen the possibility of an invasion of India, and he groaned inwardly when he thought of the inadequacy of the forces at his disposal. Consequently he received me with open arms when I held out the prospect of about a quarter of a million armed and trained recruits."

"What had the Viceroy to say about a proposal that surely must have been most unexpected?"

"At first he was definitely hostile."

"I can easily imagine that he would be. He probably spoke about the political consequences. A quarter of a million armed men would undoubtedly be a potential source of danger to the Indian Army of occupation."

"As a matter of fact he did hint at serious political consequence, but the C-in-C cavalierly brushed his contention aside. He is a soldier through and through. He is not very fond of talking. Whatever he says he means, and he generally leaves no doubt as to his meaning. He emphatically declared that he didn't give a damn about politics. He wouldn't touch the

blessed thing with a forty yard pole. His job was to defend India. If there did happen to be an invasion in the near future he hadn't a hope in heaven of successfully defending the country with the present forces at his disposal. Furthermore if war did break out, there would be very little chance of reinforcements from home. If by a chance reinforcements were sent, it was doubtful if they would ever arrived, and in any case they would be centuries too late. He was out for accepting all the help he could possibly get from India and damn the political consequences."

"Perhaps," remarked Bannerji quietly, "a successful defence of India from a foreign invasion would automatically solve all political problems."

"How do you mean?" queried Major Cathcart.

"If India were saved mainly by the assistance provided by the Indians themselves, don't you think the way would be paved for a friendly and mutual independent coalition with distinct advantages to both parties of the agreement?"

"Do you know, I think you are absolutely right. I never thought of that. Like killing two birds with the one stone, what?"

“And from the ashes thereof might arise a permanent and sympathetic union and understanding.”

“If I ever have the chance of meeting the Viceroy again, and the probabilities are all in my favour, I shall take jolly good care to rub in that point. Even after the outspoken declaration of the C-in-C he still remained unconvinced. Then I brought my heavy guns into action by quietly insinuating that the decision was really in my hands. He reluctantly concurred, and left the C-in-C and myself to discuss the necessary details.”

“It was pretty plain sailing after that, I suppose.”

“Not a bit of it. We got into stormy water almost immediately. He took it for granted that the whole quarter of a million men would be handed over to him lock, stock, and barrel, and proceeded to apportion them out amongst the various Commands. He thought that a larger proportion should go to the Northern and Eastern Commands than to the Western and Southern, because he was of opinion that the main brunt of the attack would be from the North and the East. I pulled him up pretty abruptly

by pointing out that he was labouring under a very serious misapprehension."

"What was that?"

"The fact that this new army was not completely at his disposal. He ranted and he raved and he demonstrated that any other position would be unthinkable, absurd, and ridiculous. There must be unity of command. That was at least one lesson we learned from the Great War. Eventually I brought him round to my point of view."

"How?"

"I simply stated that he could only have the men on my conditions. The conditions were that he would have complete control with regard to strategy and tactics, but that the organisation should remain in my hands. By the way I must confess to a little bit of delicate diplomacy in that connection. If I had insisted that the organisation were to remain in your hands, he would have probably stuck his toes in the ground for another couple of hours. He would have strongly objected to leave the organisation to an outsider with whom he had never come in contact. He knew me, and he also knew that he could not only rely on me, but that I would

carry out his orders willingly and conscientiously. Of course at the same time I can absolutely assure you that you will always retain complete and full control."

"I am afraid," said Bannerji smiling, "that it is you who are now labouring under a serious misapprehension. I have no longer any control over the organisation."

"Good Lord," exclaimed Major Cathcart, "what has occurred? Has the League of Youth gone bust? Everything was going so smoothly that I half expected that there was bound to be a snag somewhere."

"You need not feel the slightest bit worried about the League of Youth. It is growing stronger and stronger every day numerically and otherwise. The only snag is that the control has passed completely out of my hands."

"Who controls it now?"

"Sheila. She has complete and absolute control. I do not come into the picture at all. Not only her orders but even her wishes are looked upon as more or less divine commandments."

"You did give me a bit of a start. Now I can breathe freely again. You'll trust me, Sheila,

won't you?"

"Absolutely," declared Sheila with emphasis.

"Once the unity of command was settled things began to move apace. I thought I was able to do a bit of a hustle when occasion required, but the C-in-C left me standing cold, stiff, and breathless. He whisked me off to the various Commands. He did not believe in wasting valuable time in correspondence. He allowed a week for each Command, but he beat his own scheduled time by three whole days. Having arrived back in time for tiffin to-day, he coolly suggested that he would like to have a look at Headquarters here this evening."

"Rather awkward for you, wasn't it?" remarked Mabel.

"Very awkward indeed. I know nothing about the details of the organisation, and haven't the foggiest notion where the various detachments are situated. A thorough knowledge of your subject is essential when the C-in-C is on the war path."

"How did you manage to put him off?"

"Another delicate little piece of diplomacy."

"What was the white lie on this occasion?"

"You."

"Can I have some more details, please?"

"Certainly. I told him that I had an important engagement with you this evening."

"He didn't believe that, surely?"

"I don't think he did really, but it dawned on him that I wasn't hankering after his company on this particular occasion."

"He must be extraordinarily clever."

"His worst enemies wouldn't have the cheek to call him dull. You will have an opportunity of judging for yourself very soon. He is coming along to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

"You had better take him in hand immediately, Sheila, and put him wise to a few things. By the way you haven't seen the Headquarters yet, have you?"

"I am afraid I haven't but I'll have a good look over it to-morrow with the C-in-C. He doesn't neglect many details."

"But how are you going to answer all his questions?"

"I am not going to make the slightest attempt to answer any of his questions. I shall have great pleasure in introducing Sheila as the Commandant of the League of Youth, and Sheila

will boldly carry on, telling him the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the benighted truth. No deception whatsoever. In addition Sheila will be saved the bother of explaining things twice over."

"You seem to have been developing a strong line in diplomacy recently."

"Only because I was compelled by circumstances over which I had no control, as the Tommy said when he was forced to cough up the bottle of brandy he had stolen from the Officers' Mess."

Punctually at ten o'clock the following morning the C-in-C arrived.

"I hope Major Cathcart was in time for his engagement yesterday evening," he said to Mabel."

"Only just. If he hadn't turned up, he would have been for it with a vengeance."

"I am very glad there is someone who is able to keep him in order. He is too fond of getting his own way. The unfortunate part, however, is that he is nearly always right."

He was introduced to Sheila as the Commandant of the League of Youth. The neat simple workmanlike uniform and the clever

determined face made an immediate appeal.

"It is very good of you, Commandant, to allow me to come and visit your Headquarters. I hope I am not causing you any bother or inconvenience."

"No bother or inconvenience whatsoever. I am very glad that you were able to find time to come over and pay a visit."

"If there is you must put all the blame on Major Cathcart. He is always poking his nose into things."

"I don't seem to be the little white-haired boy this morning," murmured Major Cathcart *sotto voce* to Bannerji.

As the C-in-C shook hands with Bannerji, he remarked:—

"Surely we have met before somewhere?"

He gazed at the courteous, white-haired gentleman who in spite of his white hair looked alert and vigorous.

"I remember you very well. We met when I was a Judge at Haragpur. Mrs. Cathcart and Sheila were also with me then but you probably don't remember them. It's a very long time ago now."

He turned round and looked hard at Mabel

and Sheila trying to place them.

"Do you know I think I've got them. I remember often seeing a pretty girl and a fascinating child riding on the race-course and taking the jumps like professionals."

"Yes," laughed Bannerji, "you have got them all right."

"Well, well, how small the world is after all. Come along, Commandant, and we'll make a start. You need not come, Cathcart, as you must have seen all this many times before."

There was not the faintest glimmer of a smile on the face of the C-in-C.

"What time would you like luncheon?" enquired Bannerji.

"I meant to be back at my own Headquarters for luncheon, but I'd like to change my mind and accept your kind invitation. About one o'clock. Will that suit?"

"Very well indeed. That is our usual hour."

"By the way, Cathcart, would you mind ringing up my A.D.C. and tell him I won't be back for luncheon? also cancel any engagement I may have made for this evening."

"He may probably like to know the probable time of your return."

"Tell him to expect me when he sees me."

Sheila drove the C-in-C in her own car. On the way she explained their daily routine.

"I have made no special arrangements for to-day. They will be carrying on with their ordinary programme."

"Splendid. I always find that a set programme seldom works out fair. The Inspecting Officer is naturally disappointed if there is not an almost perfect show, whilst the advantages of a previous preparation are more than counterbalanced by nervous strain. Are your recruits by any chance nervous?"

"I really don't think they are. Anyway not of inspections. They rather play up than otherwise."

"Like to show off their paces, what?"

"Yes, but not from an individual point of view. They are all rather proud of their organisation and are anxious to do it credit."

"They have already developed an 'esprit de corps' then?"

"Yes, undoubtedly, but also something higher and even more binding than 'esprit de corps'."

"What is that?"

"Esprit de la patrie."

Even in the short time of their drive to the Headquarters the C-in-C already felt the effect of Sheila's personality. The way she drove the car was indicative of her character. A firm light touch on the wheel. No faltering and no indecision. An easy effortless concentration.

Sheila pulled up at the Broadcasting Station

"Shall we have a look at the buildings first?"

"Carry on, please Commandant. I am completely in your hands."

They entered the Broadcasting Station and found there a small class being instructed in the method of receiving and transmitting.

"What is the idea?" enquired the C-in-C.

"General information in the first place, and in the second it also proves a very valuable and expeditious means of communication. With the radio supplemented by aeroplanes I can have orders distributed to the various branches throughout the whole of India within twenty-four hours."

"Much quicker than I can do it. Code, of course?"

"Yes, but very simple. The letters of the alphabet stand for simple sentences which can easily be memorised. Those sentences comprise

practically all the urgent and important messages that may ever possibly be required."

Their next visit was to the lecture rooms and the Library. The lecture rooms were vacant at that particular hour, but the C-in-C was deeply interested in the well-stocked library, especially in the section dealing with military operations.

"We have concentrated on the Great War," remarked Sheila, "and have endeavoured to make this section as complete as possible. A certain amount of volumes dealing with the Napoleonic Wars have been included by unanimous request."

"Why are the Napoleonic Wars so popular?"

"Napoleon cuts such a large figure in military history and he seems to make a striking appeal to the youthful imagination."

"Hero-worship, I suppose."

"Perhaps a model to be imitated."

They made a quick tour through the living quarters. The C-in-C was very much struck by the neatness and orderliness everywhere displayed. The kitchens came in for special attention. They were spotless. The brass vessels shone like mirrors against a background of white-washed walls and a green-tiled floors. Sheila explained

that all the work in connection with the cooking and waiting was performed by the recruits themselves in rotation. There was not a single servant in the whole area.

There were two platoons on the parade ground. One was engaged in signalling and the other in extended order drill.

The C-in-C enquired what was the extent of their training.

"Up to battalion drill. We have quite sufficient numbers for platoon and company drill, but we have to do skeleton battalion drill."

Before going along to the aerodrome where the other two platoons were engaged, Sheila showed him the girls at practical Red Cross work. Various kinds of casualties were described by the Instructress. Then individuals were told off to represent those casualties, and batches of recruits were ordered to give First Aid. The casualties on this occasion represented a fractured forearm, a broken leg, and a severed artery. The C-in-C admired the very clear exposition of the theory and the efficient handling of the cases by the recruits.

They found Captain Umrao Singh superintending the firing at the range. Sheila introduced

him as the General Captain, and the C-in-C talked to him about his experience in the Army. The Military Cross caught his eye.

"Congratulations," said the C-in-C, pointing to the coveted white and purple ribbon. "France or Mesopotamia?"

"Afghanistan, Sir."

"How do you find the recruits?"

"Very good, Sir."

"Quick in the up-take?"

"Very quick indeed, Sir."

"Likely to make good marksmen?"

"Most of them are that already, Sir."

"Excellent. They may all be needed sooner than you expect."

"I hope so, Sir," replied Umrao Singh with the light of battle glinting in his eyes.

"That's the spirit. By the way, do they do any machine-gun work?"

"Yes, Sir, as soon as they have completed their rifle training."

"Thank you very much, Umrao Singh. Carry on."

Again Sheila asked him would he like to have a look at the hangars.

There were four planes in all. One was

Sheila's private property, and another was partly dismantled for instructional purposes. The remaining two were used for beginners' flights.

"This is my special side-line," remarked Sheila, "just as Captain Umrao Singh takes special charge of the musketry."

"Do they all become pilots?"

"Yes, every single individual. I think they are keener on this part of the training than on any other. Even the girls want to learn to fly."

"Do you allow them?"

"Not so far."

"Why not?"

"They have a tremendously long course to finish in a comparatively short time, and I think they will be more useful as trained nurses than as pilots or observers."

"You fly yourself, of course?"

"Would you like a joy ride?" asked Sheila smiling.

"Nothing I should like better."

Willing hands wheeled out Sheila's plane, and in a few minutes they were in the air. Again the C-in-C was struck by the cool decisive manner in which the controls were manipulated. After circling a few times over the camp, Sheila made

straight for the Ganges which she struck at Garmukhtesar. Flying low she followed the course of the river upwards until she came to Hardwar. Flying lower still she gave the C-in-C a magnificent panoramic view of the spectacular Kumbh Mela. They were back again at the aerodrome in little over an hour.

"Thank you very much indeed, Commandant for a most interesting morning."

Sheila looked at her watch.

"We shall just be in about right time for luncheon."

Major Cathcart was waiting for them on the steps when they arrived.

"Did you show the C-in-C all the works successfully, Sheila?"

"Yes, she did," replied the C-in-C, anticipating Sheila. "It was a very excellent show indeed. I'd strongly advise you to pay it a visit whenever you have a little time at your disposal."

Major Cathcart winked at Sheila.

"Will you excuse me," interposed Sheila. "I'll run along and see about the tiffin. Will you bring the C-in-C along when he is ready? He may like to have a wash and brush up. You'll find drinks in the drawing-room."

Major Cathcart brought the C-in-C to his own room.

"Pretty busy just now?" enquired the C-in-C.

"Not particularly. I have just recently secured a very efficient and reliable substitute."

"Where is he working?"

"Amidst sleigh-bells and vodka."

"So you are practically at a loose end for the moment?"

"Those moments unfortunately are few and far between. You're not thinking of asking me to do a job of work, are you?"

"I am afraid so."

"I thought as much from your kind enquiries after my welfare. There is no rest for the weary."

"Rather for the willing."

"Please let me know the worst at once."

"I want you on my personal staff."

"As what?"

"Liaison Officer."

"Liaison Officer?"

"Between the regular and irregular forces."

"With pleasure. An irregular appointment suggested by a regular brain-wave."

"I thought the irregularity of the procedure would appeal to you."

When they went back to the drawing-room they found Sheila, Mabel, and Bannerji already assembled there. The C-in-C received an unexpected shock. It took him some time to reconcile in his mind the graceful sari-clad figure of his present hostess with the Commandant of the League of Youth.

"What a remarkable change," he thought, "and what a remarkably beautiful girl."

Sheila noticed his surprise and smiled at him in a friendly manner as she led the way into the dining-room. Mabel was placed between the C-in-C and Bannerji, whilst she herself sat between the C-in-C and Major Cathcart.

The C-in-C turned to Sheila.

"How long have you known Major Cathcart?"

"For quite a long time. Do you know in the beginning I almost hated him."

"I must confess he is rather trying at times. Was it a case of something he did or something he didn't do?"

"Emphatically something he did. Mabel was my governess and I was having a most gloriously happy time. Major Cathcart came along and unexpectedly whisked her away."

"It is always the unexpected with Major

Cathcart. In the Staff College he never did a stroke of work apparently and yet he always topped the list in the examinations."

"My turn now, Sheila," remarked Major Cathcart. "The C-in-C used to be a wild young devil in the Staff College. On more than one occasion it was prophesied that he would come to a sticky end."

"Prophecy fulfilled," retorted the C-in-C. "I can't imagine a stickier end than the one I am in at the present moment. I suppose he has his good points, Mrs. Cathcart."

"Now, Mabel," chipped in her husband, "here you have a chance of a lifetime."

"No intimidation," laughed the C-in-C.

"His good points would be very much more in evidence if he hadn't the unfortunate knack of always trying to hide them."

"Do you think that is a back-handed compliment or a good chit, Bannerji?" enquired Major Cathcart.

"I think it is an excellent chit and I can supplement it by saying that your efforts at concealment have never been wholly successful."

"I am afraid we are beaten, Commandant," confessed the C-in-C.

"Not quite beaten, but a temporary check in the face of overwhelming odds."

"You can have that," replied Major Cathcart.

"By the way," remarked Bannerji to the C-in-C when luncheon was over, "what is your programme for the afternoon?"

"I thought of having a pow-wow with the Commandant and the latest addition to my personal staff."

"Who is that?"

"Major Cathcart."

"Oh," involuntarily exclaimed Mabel.

"Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Cathcart. His permanent headquarters will be here."

"I am afraid that is not very much of a consolation."

"Why?"

"His absence from his permanent place of abode has always been more conspicuous than his presence."

"I think I can safely guarantee that you will both be in the same country for some time to come."

"We shall all be very glad of that," said Bannerji. "Perhaps the best place for your conference will be my study. You will probably

sent by the crisp, business-like tone of the C-in-C.

"Major Cathcart tells me that you have about a quarter of a million trained recruits."

"Yes, including girls."

"How many?"

"About fifty thousand."

"That leaves about two hundred thousand recruits. How are they distributed?"

Sheila produced a map of India on which the various branches were marked in small red circles.

"You see they are well distributed over the whole of India with due regard to the divisions in the various provinces."

"Roughly how does the number of recruits compare with the number of the population?"

"The population of India as a whole is about four hundred million, and the total number of recruits about two hundred thousand. The population of each province is on an average about forty million, and the number of recruits at present apportioned to each province is about twenty thousand. Again a division has a population of about four million whilst the number of recruits in each division is about two thousand."

"I see. In military terms then each division

represents a Brigade, each province a division, and India as a whole about three Corps, forming a united Army under a unified Command. Easily expanded, I suppose?"

"Very easily. At present our main difficulty is in keeping down the numbers."

"How do you keep in touch with the various branches?"

"By direct personal touch."

"Surely that is not possible."

"Why?"

"Well each of your branches represents about one company. I have a much smaller army than you have, and it would be absolutely impossible for me to keep in direct personal touch with each of my companies."

"The circumstances are entirely different. You seldom meet your Company Commanders. In fact it is doubtful if you have ever met the whole of them even once."

"Unfortunately there is no doubt about the fact. I have not met fifty per cent of them, and then only for about a minute each on an average."

"All my Company Commanders are trained here under my supervision. I know them all personally."

"Isn't it likely that you may forget some of them?"

"It is not very likely. I visit each branch at least once a year, and all the Company Commanders come to Headquarters annually for a short refresher course."

"You have undoubtedly established direct personal contact, because even if you do happen to forget some of the Company Commanders, none of them is likely to forget you. Are all the branches co-ordinated under your direct control?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever thought of decentralising?"

"I have a scheme already prepared which I hope to put into operation next year."

"Next year may be too late."

"I can put it into operation to-morrow under certain conditions."

"May I know what the scheme is, and also the conditions?"

Sheila again referred to the map, and pointed out about a dozen large red circles, which were connected by faint dotted lines with the smaller circles, and even from the smaller circles fainter dotted lines branched out in various directions.

“The scheme is a very simple one. Each large red circle denotes the proposed headquarters of a province, and each small red circle denotes the proposed headquarters of a division. The division in due course will be mapped out into various districts.”

“Just a moment. Your territorial division corresponds roughly to a Brigade, and your province to a military Division. That is how it stands at present, isn't it?”

“Yes, and the reason for the delay in decentralisation is a lack of sufficient trained officers for the higher commands.”

“I think I can supply you with those, or at least with a sufficient number to make a start possible.”

“Thank you very much, but it is here exactly where I wish to lay down certain conditions before I can accept your offer.”

Sheila spoke with a quiet determination. The C-in-C felt instinctively that if he wanted this new army, he would have to accept the conditions, whatever they were, without any compromise. He knew that assistance was imperative. He hesitated, but only for a short time, before he replied:—

"I am going to speak to you very frankly, Commandant. You probably know as well as I do the present state of affairs in the world which is sooner or later bound to end in war. You also probably know as well as I do that India is bound to be in the vortex of hostilities. It will be my job to defend India. With the inadequate forces at my disposal I shall be unable to do so successfully. In the event of the outbreak of hostilities I shall be compelled to seek help from within this country. There is not a shred of hope of any outside reinforcements arriving in time to be of any kind of assistance. That is the position. Naturally I shall be only too glad to agree to any conditions with which it is in my power to comply."

"I shall also be very frank with you. I think it is the best way, because then there will not be the slightest cause for any friction or misunderstanding. If we are to work together we must do so in complete harmony."

"I quite agree."

"I shall very gladly avail myself of the assistance of your officers, as many as you may think necessary, or as many as you can afford to give me. I can, however, only use them for instructional

purposes. I will not give them powers of command. On the other hand I can give you my word of honour that all orders issued by you with regard to the tactical and strategical defence of India from foreign invasion will be implicitly carried out. For that purpose I place my organisation, such as it is, unreservedly at your disposal."

"I am indeed more grateful to you than I can say. You have helped me out of a very awkward predicament."

"There is one thing more," continued Sheila. "I told you I was going to be very frank, and I do not wish to mislead you in any way. Any orders issued by you with regard to the suppression of the rights and liberties of my people, I shall unhesitatingly refuse to obey."

"I am satisfied. I sincerely hope that such a contingency will never arise, both for my own sake personally and also for the sake of my country."

The respect and admiration of the C-in-C for the Commandant grew by leaps and bounds.

"By God," he thought to himself, "a modern Joan of Arc."

"Will there be any necessity for a written agreement?" queried Sheila.

"You have given me your word of honour, Commandant. That is enough for me."

"It may not be enough to satisfy others."

"Others will have to be satisfied with me or with my resignation."

Major Cathcart hastened to break the awkward little pause that followed:—

"I don't seem to be pulling any weight in this little show."

"We'll very soon remedy that," replied the C-in-C. "First of all you will act as liaison officer between the Commandant and myself. You agree to that, Commandant?"

"Yes, certainly."

"You see we shall have many things to discuss. It will be awkward for me to come here very often, and it will be very inconvenient for you to come to my headquarters, or wherever I happen to be. I think Major Cathcart will fit the bill very well."

"Perfectly."

"Now, Cathcart, let us have your latest information in detail."

Sheila produced a map of Europe and Asia, and spread it on the table.

"I have already given you a rough outline

of the proposed plan of campaign. The forces of the East and West intend to join hands in India and thus complete the isolation of both Russia and France.”

“I expect they know the extent of the present forces in India?”

“Down to the slightest detail.”

“Do they know anything about the New Army?”

“Information has been carefully supplied through the usual channels that the League of Youth is a silly boy and girl movement which can be safely ignored, and that the organisation is likely to be more of a help to them than a hindrance.

“Do they believe that?”

“Of course they do. Human nature is very gullible, especially with regard to palatable reports. They are also led to believe that if the inhabitants are not actually for them, they will not be definitely hostile.”

“What are the *points d'object*?”

Major Cathcart with the aid of a pencil pointed out in succession Quetta, Karachi, and Madras. Next he traced out the overland route from Persia to Afghanistan, and the sea route to Karachi

through the Persian Gulf. Finally he turned to South China, and slowly drew his pencil through French Indo-China, and on to Burma and Rangoon, and Madras.

"Not so simple as it looks," remarked the C-in-C.

"They have done their best to make it as simple as possible. Afghanistan may decide to throw in their lot with Germany, and launch an attack on Quetta. Simultaneously a German attack will be launched against Karachi from the sea. As soon as the Quetta-Karachi line is consolidated, the next objective will be Lahore, and then Delhi."

"And how is the attack from Madras going to be developed?"

"Upwards and outwards. They expect that most of our scanty troops will be concentrated in the North, and that the journey from Madras to Allahabad via Nagpur will be more or less in the nature of a joy ride. Bombay and Calcutta will be taken from the rear, and the junction of the two forces will finally take place in Delhi."

The C-in-C pondered over the map for a long time. Granted that the first objectives were

taken, he would undoubtedly be placed in a very awkward position. In the North he would be liable to attack both from the flank and the rear, and in the South the advance of a lightly-armed mobile column, if sufficiently numerous, to Allahabad was within the bounds of possibility. Before coming to any definite conclusion with regard to his own projected plan of campaign, he turned to Major Cathcart:—

“The overland route to Afghanistan is not only possible and probable but also feasible. On the other hand the Navy would make an attack on Karachi very problematical of success.”

“In ordinary times such an attack would never even materialise. The half dozen cruisers detailed for Indian Coast defence would be quickly supplemented by reinforcements from Singapore and the Mediterranean. On the outbreak of war, however, very little reinforcements would be available from the Mediterranean.”

“Reinforcements could still be sent from Singapore.”

“Unfortunately they may not be available. There will be nothing to prevent the Japanese Navy from concentrating at that point, and it will take the whole of the Naval force at present

at Singapore all its time to counter the attack successfully. In the meantime the open port of Madras will be an easy target from Rangoon."

"Is the port of Madras so very open?"

"The Emden shelled Madras during the Great War, and sailed away unscathed. I think that is pretty distinct evidence of its vulnerability."

"Is your information reliable?"

"I have every reason to believe that it is."

"In that case my plan of campaign is fairly obvious. I am not altogether wholly responsible for the repulse of an attack on Karachi or Madras from the sea, but it is undoubtedly my job to prevent an overland invasion of Northern India. On that account I shall have to concentrate a large portion of my forces in the North. Karachi-Quetta-Peshawar makes a long scraggy line of defence, and it would be impossible to prevent a determined attack from piercing the line at one point or another. Any breach of the line of defence would prove fatal. Consequently my main line of defence must be the Indus. What do you think Cathcart?"

"I quite agree. That will make it necessary for the enemy to have a lengthened line of communication through very difficult country.

“Moreover,” added the C-in-C, “I shall be in touch with the Russians at Gilgit, and Tibet and Nepal will be on my right flank. The position, as far as the North is concerned, ought to be then fairly secure. Now for the disposal of the forces in the South.”

“What are your instructions?” queried Sheila.

“I can only tell you at present the broad general outlines of the proposed disposition. The primary object will be threefold, namely, to guard the main line of communication between Madras and Nagpur, and to form a ring of inland defence for the protection of Bombay and Calcutta. I shall send you details as soon as I can.”

“Is there anything I can set to work on immediately?”

“Yes. Get your district and provincial headquarters ready, and expand as quickly as possible. I can thank my lucky star and the Commandant for the League of Youth.”

“They may be both one and the same,” suggested Major Cathcart.

Sheila set to work right away. She planned a lightning tour to the proposed headquarters in all the provinces and issued orders to all the captains in the various districts to meet her there.

Not content with meeting the captains, she made arrangements to hold a series of public meetings for the purpose of explaining not only the object but the necessity of the League of Youth. Generous public support was imperative in order to compare a speedy and successful expansion. Sheila was already personally known to a quarter of a million of the Youth of India, and her fame and reputation had spread far and wide throughout the whole country. Her first public meeting was typical of many that followed.

She decided to hold the first meeting at Turcemapur where the League of Youth had originally started. Written invitations were sent out to all the prominent citizens, and the date was announced to the public at large by beat of drum.

The time was fixed for five o'clock in the evening. Long before the appointed hour people began to troop in thousands to the aerodrome where the meeting was to take place. The huge crowds were easily and efficiently handled by the uniformed recruits and shepherded in an orderly manner to their positions. A dais had been erected and loud speakers installed.

Punctually at five o'clock Sheila ascended the

dais. At that time the multitude numbered over twenty thousand. A loud and enthusiastic burst of applause greeted her appearance. As she stood there above their heads she was the cynosure of all eyes. They believed in her. They trusted her. Many of them were reminded of the famous heroines of former ages. Many of them in their enthusiasm could easily be led to believe that she was mother India incarnate. Every word was listened to with rapt attention as she explained the origin and foundation of the League of Youth, and as she described the present state of the organisation.

“Behold,” she cried, “a dream that has come true. The dream of India awakening from her lethargic torpor, and at last beginning to realise the greatness of her destiny. The dream of youthful enthusiasm willingly harnessed in the strenuous preparation for the fulfilment of that great destiny. To-day in India there are one thousand branches of the League of Youth. From those branches every year are sent forth thousands, hundreds of thousands of trained recruits, all sworn to devote their lives to the welfare of their country. All those recruits are sound mentally and physically and are actuated by the

loftiest ideals. Moreover each one of those recruits will hand on to his children and to his children's children the torch of enthusiastic sacrifice which will eventually bear fruition in a united, happy and prosperous India.

“Unfortunately before that day arrives many difficulties will have to be surmounted, many dangers will have to be faced, and even many lives will have to be forfeited. In times of peace, organisation, training, and a sense of discipline are necessary for the smooth administration of any country. In times of war those same qualities are not only necessary but essential. Within the past twelve months you yourselves have seen two notable examples of the advantages of discipline, training, and organisation. It was by those qualities that Italy conquered Abyssinia. It was by those qualities that Japan was able to launch a successful invasion on a China that was unprepared. All those may seem to you to be theoretical considerations as far as you are concerned, but I can assure you with all the emphasis at my command that at the present moment they are considerations of the most vital importance.”

She spoke slowly and distinctly. She herself felt that she held her audience. At the same time

she paused in order that they might have an opportunity of grasping the significance of her words, but especially to prepare them for her next startling and dramatic pronouncement.

“Is there a single individual amongst the thousands of those who are present here this evening who seriously thinks that we are sufficiently organised, sufficiently trained, sufficiently disciplined to withstand a foreign invasion? Most of you up to this time have probably never given the matter a moment’s thought. Those of you who have thought of the matter have also probably quickly dismissed it from your minds on the plea that we are paying for an army to protect us. Even if this army were sufficiently numerous and sufficiently powerful are we willing to sit still and hand over to others for all time the protection of your hearths and homes? That position is unthinkable and cowardly in the extreme. This is your country, a beautiful country, a magnificent country, and a country which is second to none in the whole world in its traditions, its culture, and its civilisation. I can definitely assure you that the present army is by no means numerous or powerful enough to meet such an emergency, and it is your sacred and bounden duty to undertake immediate and

strenuous preparations for the defence of your country against a foreign invasion.

“What are the possibilities or the probabilities of a foreign invasion? It is no longer a question of a possibility or a probability. It is now a question of certainty, the most absolute certainty. Within six months, within three months, perhaps within one month foreign armies will be trampling on the sacred soil of India. Unless you are prepared beforehand, your homes and hearths will be destroyed, your shrines will be desecrated, and there will be bloodshed, rapine, and devastation throughout the land. Do not think that this is a chimera of my own imagination, or a wild flight of fantasy. Look aloft at the actual flight above your heads at the present moment.”

She suddenly pointed upwards. The intense silence that followed emphasised the mighty drone of the powerful engines of a squadron of aeroplanes in echelon flight. It did not take very long for the multitude to focus the sound. Sailing apparently without an effort, the squadron approached the aerodrome, passed over it at a height of about three thousand feet, and gradually faded away in the distance. The graphic aeroplane tattoo began and ended in a most spectacular manner.

“The aeroplanes you have just seen might very well have been marked with the German Eagle or the Rising Sun of Japan. I shudder to think what the consequences would have been in the case of war.”

The vast throng also shuddered in sympathetic unison. Nothing could more forcibly have brought home the startling and dramatic pronouncements of the speaker.

“Here then is the real reason for this evening’s meeting. I have not summoned you for any idle purpose. I have not summoned you to show off what has been done by the Headquarters of the League of Youth, or to boast about the number and efficiency of its branches. I have summoned you for quite a different reason. I want to point out to you that the number of the branches is totally inadequate. I am proud, however, to be able to say that the actual number of recruits has never presented, and will not, I hope, ever present the slightest difficulty. What I require at present is your moral support, but especially your practical support. You are all ready at all times to pay premiums to insure your material goods against unforeseen losses. Here is something on an incalculably higher plane. It is the call of India in

her approaching dire extremity for assistance and protection. In the name of your beloved motherland, in the name of all that you hold near and dear, I make an urgent appeal for your immediate support, and I feel confident that my appeal will not be in vain."

There was loud and prolonged applause, and it was an appreciable time before she was allowed an opportunity of continuing her address.

"Before concluding there is one point that I should very much like to make absolutely clear. I am not an official. I have no claim on you. You are at perfect liberty not to pay the slightest attention to what I have just now said to you. I am the Commandant of the League of Youth. That too is not an official position. It is simply a position of trust voluntarily bestowed on me by a brotherhood which is bound together by one common bond, and actuated solely by self-sacrificing service to the welfare of the country. My claim on you, if any, is purely personal. I have devoted my life to my country, to your country, to our country. I earnestly implore and beseech you to give me your help and your blessing."

Suddenly from the midst of the audience there rang out a slogan, crisp, clear and defined:—

“Sheila Ranee ki Jai, Sheila Ranee ki Jai; Sheila Ranee ki Jia.”

The slogan was immediately taken up by all, and repeated with a kind of frenzied enthusiasm.

Sheila was stirred to the very depths. She had been given spontaneously not only the help she craved, but also unwavering obedience and loyalty. At the meetings in all the other provinces the same enthusiastic obedience and the same unswerving loyalty were displayed. Everywhere now she was known as “Sheila Ranee.”

Inside a month she had succeeded in establishing Divisional cadres in all the provinces with the assistance of the officers detailed for the purpose by the C-in-C. Her next step was to establish Brigade cadres in the Districts. Here again she was ably assisted by the C-in-C. As she had anticipated, there was not the slightest difficulty about the number of recruits. They literally flocked to the various branches. Moreover there was a most satisfactory response to her appeal for funds. Accommodation, land and buildings were to be had for the mere asking. A tremendous wave of enthusiasm flooded the whole country. Sheila herself was here, there, and everywhere. Her black and silver aeroplane was now

known throughout the length and breadth of India.

In one of her short occasional visits to Tureemapur she found that Major Cathcart was absent. This was no unusual occurrence. After dinner she and Mabel and her father were in the drawing-room, discussing recent happenings.

"You seem to have a happy knack, Sheila," remarked Mabel, "of securing titles wherever you go."

"I expect you are thinking of her title of 'Princess' in Ireland," said Bannerji smiling.

"Yes, and also to her present title of 'Ranee'."

"All completely unofficial and unauthorised," replied Sheila.

"And to put it mildly, not altogether undeserved," rejoined Mabel, with a look of sincere affection and admiration for her former pupil.

A long silence followed. Sheila was enjoying the luxury of a comfortable and unaccustomed rest. She was too tired to talk, and too tired almost to think. She lay back in her chair completely relaxed. Mabel and Bannerji watched her intently. They did not speak. They sat motionless in their chairs. Both were thinking of Sheila. With her eyes closed she looked thin and pale and

almost emaciated. How long would she stand the tremendous strain under which she was living at present? Mabel wondered if Bannerji knew that Sheila and Fred were in love with each other. He probably did, and also probably realised the well-nigh insupportable drain on her nervous system. At last Mabel stood up and took Sheila by the hand:—

“Come along, Sheila. It’s time all good little girls were in bed.”

Sheila jumped laughing.

“Like old times, isn’t it? Always the perfect obedient little girl.”

Bannerji came forward and placed his two hands on Sheila’s shoulders:—

“Are you doing too much?” he enquired looking straight into her eyes.

“What worries me is that I am not getting on fast enough.”

“You can’t do more than your best, Sheila, and you are doing that at present. Be as careful as you can of your health. Conserve as much energy as possible. It will be all required when the clash comes.”

“Will it be very long now?”

“Not very long.”

Before retiring for the night Sheila opened a drawer and took out a photograph. It was a replica of the double snapshot which Fred had in his table in camp. She gazed on it for some minutes taking in every detail of his appearance. Finally she raised it to her lips murmuring:—

“My beloved.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

September 1939. The sudden and unexpected volte-face of Russia. The invasion of Poland. The upset of all previous calculations. What next?

Sheila, Mabel, Justice Bannerji, and Major Cathcart were assembled in the drawing room. The hour was 9-30 p.m. The radio was announcing the terms of the capitulation of Warsaw. Bannerji quietly stood up and switched off the harrowing tidings.

"A heroic resistance," he remarked as he resumed his seat. "If the time should ever come, God grant that we shall be able to emulate their noble endeavours and with more successful results."

The four of them sat silent. Their thoughts synchronised on Fred. They all knew that he had received orders for his return after the fiasco of the Military Mission. What had happened?

Major Cathcart looked at his watch.

"He ought to be here at any time now," he casually remarked.

"Who on earth are you talking about," said Mabel.

"'Whom' would be more correct," suggested Major Cathcart aggravatingly.

"You ask him, Sheila," exhorted Mabel. "I can never get anything out of him when he is in that mood."

For answer Sheila stood up quietly and walked out of the room. Her quick car had been the first to notice the noise of an approaching motor. She was standing on the steps of the verandah as Fred jumped out of the car and took her in his arms.

"Sheila, darling."

"My beloved."

Hand in hand they walked into the drawing room.

As soon as greetings were over Major Cathcart enquired for the latest news.

Fred shook his head as he replied:—

"Nobody knows anything for certain. Everything is in the lap of the Gods."

"I thought so," said Major Cathcart.

"You might tell us what you did think," suggested Mabel.

"That the preparations in India have been

made not a moment too soon, and that Fred has arrived back just in the nick of time."

"For what?"

"To be Squadron Commander-in-Chief of the 'Air Force' of the Citizen Army, and as the matter is rather urgent I expect Sheila and Fred would like to settle the details immediately."

"We shall settle them outside," remarked Sheila.

"Thank God, Sheila, we can work together at last."

"Yes, Fred," replied Sheila, "and perhaps we can work better and closer together as husband and wife."

The moon looked down on a pair of lovers for the moment ecstatically happy.

"With the honeymoon at Garnacanty when all is over," suggested Fred.

"Quien sabe?" murmured Sheila.

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